

Henry Young Interview

January 29, 2002

DNR: What CCC camps were you assigned to?

Henry: Bedford #1757

DNR: Was this the only CCC camp you were assigned to?

Henry: Only one in Iowa. Was in camp in Missouri in 1935, it didn't last very long. I was a brand new camp and I was enrolled on July 9th, 1935. Then it was busted up in October and people were send to different camps and I was sent to Missouri where I stayed until March. At that time I was told there was 800,000 CCC boys in the U.S at the time. During the time from when they started 33' till 41' there had been approx. 3 million boys had been through the camp. You stayed in the camp for six months at a time and you stayed so many times till they changed the rules and length of time a few times.

DNR: Where is Missouri was that first camp?

Henry: East of Lebdon, Missouri. At a camp called Falcon. Some of the work was in the timber and some of the work was on the road. I worked on the roads; I built a road from Falcon Missouri to Hazel green which is down near Ft. Lenerwood. Is was about 15 miles but I worked on the powder gang which blew stumps out of the ground.

DNR: When did you come to Bedford?

Henry: In 1938. We went to Mt. Vernon, Missouri where we were issued our clothes. There was about 15 thousand of us. Army doctors examined us and on July 9th we went to Shell Log, Missouri and were thrown on the train and we arrived in Bedford on July 11th at 5 PM and loaded on to trucks and headed down to the camp. When we arrived they had supper all ready for all 175 of us. The next morning they took us out and gave us a talk about the rules and regulations. I was there for two years, left in March 1940 because I got married. If you hadn't finished your grade school you had to take classes for two hours at night, and then you trained for some kind of a job. I thought about doing some blacksmithing, but then I thought about working in the kitchen.

DNR: Where was your hometown?

Henry: Bettersprings, Missouri

DNR: How old were you when you enrolled in the CCC?

Henry: 17 when I started. Now I'm 83.

DNR: What did you do before enrolling in the CCC?

Henry: Worked in the timber at the Ozarks, cutting railroad ties, cut virgin and state timber.

DNR: Why did you enroll in the CCC?

Henry: No work anywhere. Couldn't find a job. I made \$5/month and \$25 went home to the family. When I came up here I made \$8/month and \$22/month. Assistant leaders got \$36/month and leaders got \$45/month.

DNR: How was the first day of camp? Was it like the army?

Henry: Just like the army. You even got a haircut to 2 inches long, which cost 20 cents. You were issued a "issue kit" which included thread, needles, soap, razors, toothbrushes and toothpaste and two pair of workclothes and summertime you got sun tan uniforms. In winter you got wool, with overcoat. It was all army stuff, which was warm and went below your knees. But you didn't work in the overcoat, you worked in denims. Kind of like an army field jacket and you had longjohns, full bodied. The shoes were good, army issued. You couldn't wear other colored slippers, you didn't mix colors. You couldn't use fowl language anywhere, but we did. If you got caught you would be punished.

DNR: What personal items did you have when you arrived?

Henry: You could take a few things with you. You had to keep your clothes neatly. You kept your clothes covered and neatly organized. Wool blankets, everything was military issued. I just had the clothes on my back when I arrived at the CCC camp. Few people could afford a radio and you could play the radio when you were in the barracks. We had electricity in the barracks to plug in a radio.

DNR: What were you not allowed to keep?

Henry: Nothing that I'm not aware of. If you had guns you had to check them in. You got six days of vacation every six months. You were not allowed to have cars at camp, some did and stored them in a garage they would rent. You were not allowed to drink, but some did. No booze was allowed in the camp. You were allowed to smoke, everyone smoked for 15 cents a package. Some would chew, but not many. If you got sick you were well cared for by army doctors. You slept in your underclothes. You had sheets, mattress, and pillows. Blankets had the letters U.S on them. We had 20 beds in each barrack.

DNR: Do you remember any of your bunkmates?

Henry: James Mathews was one. Guy by the name of Martin, Dolls.

DNR: How did you guys get along?

Henry: Good, If you had problems you would fight it out with gloves on if you started trouble in the field. It didn't happen too often, usually fairly peaceful.

DNR: Tell me about the food in the mess hall.

Henry: It was good. We had beef 115 pounds to make stew. We had bacon, 135 pounds to make breakfast, cereal, grapefruit. It was just like the army. In the field me had a truck that had sandwiches, apples, and coffee. We sodded parts of the area around the Lakes of Three Fires. The shipped in Black Locus and we set them out to be planted. Down in Missouri they shipped in pines.

DNR: Who all did the cooking?

Henry: CCC Boys. Max Hark was one of the cooks who made most of the pastries and I made most of the pies. We cooked about 20 gallons of beans/ day. We had just two cooks and Harold was the Mess Sargent and another first cook name Freddie Gahm and he had an assistant named Kenny Dolls. You would work one day and had one day off. You would go to the doctor and make sure you had no cuts on your hand. You cooked everything on the same day. The off day you could go to town if you want.

DNR: How were the holiday meals?

Henry: You would have special meals for Christmas. Food was brought in from Ft. Des Moines in an army truck. We had freezers and refrigerator. The walk-in freezer was used to store half a beef or a hog. We had a hamburger grinder, steaks every once in a while. We had three army range #5 stoves.

Everything had to be perfect, even the dishes and floors had to be perfect or else you had to do it over again. The floors were wood and polished and waxed. The countertops were tin, and one had a whole with a garbage can underneath. The meals were set on all the tables in bowls, and people would come around and fill the plates if you needed refills. We had running water and electricity in the kitchen. We had a wooden and coal stove for the kitchen. The night watchmen would put coal on the stove and keep the fire going all night. We had windows to help cool the kitchen in the warm parts of the year.

DNR: When was payday?

Henry: On the 30th of the month.

DNR: How did you spend your money?

Henry: You went to town and do whatever you wanted. Some people would buy show tickets. The canteen book would have tickets for shows at discount prices and you would pay back the ticket at payday. The theater would give discount prices to attract a crowd of CCC men. We also went to the beer joint “ The candy kitchen”. You had to go to Missouri to get the hard stuff.

DNR: What were your days off?

Henry: Saturday and Sunday, or every other day.

DNR: Did they have dances in town?

Henry: Yes, they had dances in town and a roller rink and they had boxing ring. In fact some of the CCC boys would be in the matches.

DNR: How was the Sabbath observed in camp?

Henry: You could go to the one in town. If you didn't have a way to get to church they would take you in an army truck. But most of the guys would walk to the church in Bedford. I went with a guy a few times named Joe Norsch. Once a month, a chaplain would come and visit you and talk to the group.

DNR: Did you have any sports you could participate in at camp?

Henry: They did have ball games, but I didn't go to them. They did also have boxing against other camps; and the winner would receive a six day pass to go home with pay.

DNR: Did you ever have any personal conflicts with others in camps?

Henry: Yes, when I was in the camp down in Missouri, me a guy Ralph Gar had a fist fight and hit me right in the nose. Then a guy and me named Billy got in a fistfight out on the job. We messed each other pretty good.

DNR: Did you get disciplined?

Henry: No, nobody ever turned us in.

DNR: What were the other major problems that others had?

Henry: Every once in a while somebody would get into a fight. Some of the guys would get into trouble some of the guys in town; those fights would really get messy. The law would stop the fights most of the time.

DNR: Did any of the guys end up in jail?

Henry: No, none of the guys luckily did get thrown in jail.

DNR: I understand there were some educational/trade opportunities available. Did you take advantage of any of these?

Henry: Yes, you did go to school for certain times of the nights. We would use some of the surrounding facilities. I went to class for grade school. For two nights a week for an hour or two at a time for almost two years. Teacher was Miss. Gladson. They did some schooling in the camp at different times. The training a received for cooking was taught to me right at the camp.

DNR: What benefit did you get out of the classes after leaving the CCC?

Henry: A lot. I never cooked more than a few meals after I left the camp. All the education you learned at camp stayed with you forever.

DNR: Do you have any contact with any of the CCC worker today?

Henry: Not lately, Cliff Hanshaw I have known him before we ever joined the army. I know another guy named Charley Owens with has passed on. He was in the camp with me. Cleo Thomas was a leader when I came here. He was in the camp with me for years that were a local boy to Bedford.

DNR: How would you describe your overall experience with others at camp?

Henry: Good, really good.

DNR: What were some of the main projects your camp was involved with?

Henry: Soils, soil erosion. Down in Missouri I worked for forestry in Lebdon in 1935 and Foulton in 1936. We would build shelters full of feed for the wild game. In Bedford from 1938 to 1940 we would work on soils, build ponds and work on ditches.

DNR: Who were some of your leaders while you were in Bedford?

Henry: In Bedford Cleo Thomas and a guy who worked for the state who surveyed the land for us. We built one pond with a wheelbarrow and shovel that was 27 feet deep.

DNR: Did you get along with your leaders?

Henry: Yep.

DNR: How did you get your daily work assignments?

Henry: You just had a crew that you worked with as long as they needed you. A certain guy would haul us out to the field everyday.

DNR: What kind of equipment did you get to use?

Henry: Wheelbarrow shovels. Some of the camps had heavy equipment, but I never used any of it. Tools were issued to you and you got them out of the truck. The powder gang hauled the dynamite in the truck, which was lit with electric caps.

DNR: Were there any minority groups in the camp?

Henry: No, no other groups. 175 of the people in the camp were from Missouri.

DNR: What specific skills did you learn at camp?

Henry: Cooking, not much else. How to build check dams, soil erosion.

DNR: Did any injuries occur at the camp?

Henry: No, nobody ever did. If you did you would go to the hospital. A doctor and an orderly would take care of you from the army. The doctor did offer some shots to prevent you from getting a cold. When you first when into the camp you would get shots for smallpox.

DNR: Any insect or vermin problems?

Henry: I never noted any problems. We had them, but it was never a problem.

DNR: What contacts did you have with the local community?

Henry: On the weekends you could date girls and they had picnics, county fairs where ccc guys could get in one night for free.

DNR: Did you have a lot of contact with the girls in town?

Henry: There were a lot of girls in town. I did go steady with my future wife in Bedford.

DNR: Did you have to be back at camp by a certain time?

Henry: Yes, back by midnight. You needed a pass to leave camp at any time.

DNR: Were there any problems with other young men in the local community?

Henry: We didn't have much money to run around, we just did basic things. The locals had an opinion about us; they kept a tight line on us. We had guys in there that had time on their hands from Hannibal who would cause problems with the local community.

DNR: What is your most memorable experience at the CCC camp?

Henry: I just will never forget it. It was just like being in the army. When a Lt. Name Jensen would inspect the barracks in the army, he would bet people that he could pick out

guys who were in the ccc by the way they organized their supplies in the barracks. The way the clothes and stuff was taken care of.

DNR: How do you think your life changed, by enrolling in the CCC camp?

Henry: Good, I really think it was a great thing. There was a lot of poor people back then.

DNR: Were you able to get a job after the CCC?

Henry: Yes, started going door to door asking for work. I got a job working on oats working ten hours working with a team of horses. Then I got a job cutting hedges. I just got jobs working for farmers. I went on to lay brick, then carpenter and cabinet making. I have a cabinet shop downtown right now. I built these cabinets in 1960.

DNR: Where were you in the military?

Henry: Italy. Infantry Division.