

CCC INTERVIEW WITH PAUL BONNET

Date:

Location:

Interviewer: Larry Wilson

DNR: Where was your hometown?

Paul: Bussy, Iowa.

DNR: How old were you when you enrolled?

Paul: 16.

DNR: What kind of work did you do before enrolling?

Paul: Farming. A dollar a day.

DNR: Why did you join?

Paul: To help out my folks. In those days a farmer couldn't support himself.

DNR: What camps were you assigned too?

Paul: Knoxville. Then we were transferred to Oskaloosa.

DNR: Remember the year?

Paul: Late '37 or 1938. Right after I got out of high school.

DNR: Where did you sign up at?

Paul: Knoxville at the camp. They gave me a physical.

DNR: Did they issue you clothes?

Paul: Yes.

DNR: Did you take any personal items to the camp?

Paul: Just my clothes.

DNR: Was there anything you couldn't bring?

Paul: I don't remember. They furnished the soaps and shaving stuff. We bought the rest at the PX.

DNR: How were you assigned a place to sleep?

Paul: They just assigned it with a cot. They were wooden barracks.

DNR: Cot and the bedding supplied to you?

Paul: Yes.

DNR: Do you remember any of the guys you bunked with?

Paul: Wiganal. He was from Mulcher, Iowa.

DNR: Did you keep in touch with him?

Paul: No.

DNR: How did you get along in the barracks?

Paul: Okay.

DNR: How was the food in the mess hall?

Paul: Pretty good. You couldn't go hungry.

DNR: Who did the cooking?

Paul: They had special guys doing it. You would do KP to help clean the kitchen.

DNR: Did you have any holiday meals?

Paul: Oh yeah. You didn't starve to death. They had special dinners for Christmas. Most of the time, the guys never griped about the food.

DNR: When was payday?

Paul: The end of the month.

DNR: How much were you paid?

Paul: \$21 a month. I sent all mine home. Then my folks would send me money.

DNR: How did you spend your money?

Paul: Saturday night go out. In those days, there wasn't much. Might have a beer. We didn't drink much in those days. Albia was our main hangout.

DNR: Did they give you days off?

Paul: We got passes. I was 20 miles from Bussy. I would hitchhike home. The main highway from Knoxville was asphalt and concrete.

DNR: Was the Sabbath observed?

Paul: There was not much to do. I played ping-pong in the rec hall. I went home on the weekend. I was 16.

DNR: Was there a church at the camp or a service?

Paul: I didn't go.

DNR: Were there sport's activities?

Paul: We would play some baseball.

DNR: Did you have boxing matches?

Paul: I didn't like boxing.

DNR: Did you have any personal conflicts in the camp?

Paul: There wasn't much of that. We had nothing. Just the lousy \$21 a month.

DNR: If someone was breaking the rules, how would they be punished?

Paul: The captain and the lieutenant handled that. The military was in charge of the barracks.

DNR: Did they put on any trade or educational opportunities?

Paul: They put you out on terracing, tree planting.

DNR: You worked on farmer's properties?

Paul: The farmer would say he had a 100 acres. The surveyors would go out and figure out where to plant the trees. We built small dams and ponds for soil erosion.

DNR: So it was a soil and erosion camp?

Paul: Yes.

DNR: How did you get your work?

Paul: They would just load you up on the truck to do fence work.

DNR: Did you have to learn how to do it?

Paul: I done that on the farm. The guys from the coal mining towns, did not have the experience. They just did odd jobs.

DNR: Do you remember the leaders of the jobs?

Paul: There was always a leader on the job.

DNR: Did everyone get along in the workplace?

Paul: We took our time. We were never abused.

DNR: How did you know you were supposed to do?

Paul: The head foreman would have a meeting with the foreman on where to go and what to do.

DNR: What type of equipment did you use?

Paul: We had to check out spades, axes and whatever. The squad leader would sign for them and check them back in at night.

DNR: Do you remember any of the guys you worked with?

Paul: No.

DNR: Did you have any contact with the ones you worked with?

Paul: No.

DNR: Did you guys get along?

Paul: Yes.

DNR: Did the local kids get along with the camp kids?

Paul: There was some guys who came out of Chicago who were different. Everybody got along. Just like the army.

DNR: Were there any minority groups in the camp?

Paul: No.

DNR: Did you learn any specific skills?

Paul: I learned a lot about soil erosion. When you made a small dam, which is an art, we laid wire, then straw and then dirt. We did a lot of work in Knoxville. They needed it bad.

DNR: What caused the erosion?

Paul: '34 to '36 no rain. The erosion had already taken place. The way how I get it, from 1920 to 1930, 1929, there was good times, and a lot of farming. That's when the erosion happened. They were farming too hard. They never made terraces. On the tree farming, we would cut a big square of sod out. Then we would stir the ground and then come back in two days.

DNR: How big were the trees?

Paul: 15 inches to two feet.

DNR: Were there any injuries?

Paul: In the wintertime we worked in rock quarries. So a rock might go into someone's eye. There's a rock quarry near Knoxville. We had to ride in the truck to get there. We had a hospital right there in the camp.

DNR: Did you ever get hurt?

Paul: No. But I got sick once with the flu. I had to go to the hospital.

DNR: Were there any diseases in the camp?

Paul: No.

DNR: Were there any rodent or insect problems?

Paul: No.

DNR: Did you work outside the camp with the community?

Paul: No.

DNR: Did you have any contact with the local community?

Paul: No. Just my own relations. In those days people were more social than today. I'm an old codger. On the interstate, I'm scared to drive out there. It's a rudeness on the real young people who are 16 or 17. But, I hate to say it, but, past generations have been forgotten. Maybe not all of them. I've thought over very deeply sometimes. I wander if it is the times we are in, the uncertainty, the uncertainty of jobs, uncertainty of government.

DNR: I remember when I was raising my children, my mother never complained about the way I raised them, but she would say 'you would never get away with that.' I guess we need to have faith.

DNR: Were there any Masonic organizations?

Paul: No.

DNR: Did you have contact with any girls?

Paul: No.

DNR: How long were you in?

Paul: Two years. I enjoyed the two years.

DNR: Were there troubles with the local boys and the camp boys?

Paul: With the girls. The local boys didn't want the girls running around with those CCC guys.

DNR: What do you think the local community thought of the CCC camp?

Paul: They liked us.

DNR: Do you have one memorable experience?

Paul: I think when we were taking down the barracks at the Knoxville camp. It was a helluva time taking it down.

DNR: Did you have any odd experiences?

Paul: I can't think of anything. We were building an erosion dam, and we used cement. I was making cement stones. That was quite a trick. We did a lot of cement work and riff raff work.

DNR: What do you think was your biggest accomplishment at the camp there?

Paul: Being out of high school, it gave me a place to work. It had good food.

DNR: Do you feel you had a good idea to get along with others?

Paul: All the boys got along good. They didn't work them to death.

DNR: Do you think your life was changed?

Paul: Yes. I lived on a small farm. He had just 80 acres.

DNR: What did you do after the C's?

Paul: Day labor. I enlisted in the army for four years. Two times overseas. I was in Puerto Rico for one year. Then I went to Louisiana for infantry training. Then I went to England. They shot us right into Patton's Army then we were in France and suffered 50% casualties in one battle. Then we went to Holland and stayed with the British. We were in the middle of the Battle of the Bulge. We didn't have any winter clothes. It was cold. (worst winter in 50 years) The Germans and the Americans had the same problems. We didn't want to damage buildings, so we could have a place to

sleep out of the cold. You would think, “Can I survive this night and have another day.” Just surviving. Just surviving. Well, I got on the G.I. Bill and I didn’t go to college. I learned how to be an automobile mechanic. Then I started my own business selling cars and motorcycles. I retired from it. I retired in ’85. I sold out and then went to work for Amana for eight years. I didn’t have anything to do. That’s my biography. So you I had six years of service. The war was useless. I begrudge the war. I can’t watch the T.V. anymore.

END OF TRANSCRIPT – SAM J. HAIM - SCRIBE