

Civilian Conservation Corp Comments

By Bill Potkovick of 118 Redwood Jct., Warren PA 16365

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Question 1: What were you doing immediately prior to joining the CCC (where living, type of job, wages, etc.)? I just got back from NH where I worked as a pulp cutter and driving pulp down the Androscoggin River to Berlin NH. We hiked into Camp #2 (20 miles). There were about 60 men in camp, kerosene lamps, hot water for bath heated by camp caretaker, called bull work; we got up with the stars, cut all day and back to camp with the stars. A few days temp would go down to -35 degrees, we would not work these days. Wages were piecework \$3.00/cord (4x4x8). Between cutting pulp, working in the kitchen and driving pulpwood down river I came back to Schenectady NY (home) with \$350. It was very hard work for a kid of 21.

Q 2: Why did you join the CCC? I joined because it was easier to join at this time than it had been before when you had to practically be starving to be eligible. I liked the outdoor work.

Q 3: What was the process of joining (physical exam, papers signed, etc.)? The process of joining was to go to the fed building, fill out a questionnaire, take the physical and my mom and dad signing papers. This is very vague for me to remember.

Q 4: What were you told as far as your duties, where you would be assigned, length of stay? How did what they told you about your assignment compare to the realities of the assignment? I had an idea knowing there was going to be a lot of discipline with the Army in camp and 6 month enlistment wasn't that bad and besides my previous living in tight quarters with men and some rules and regulations that the Brown Paper Pulp Co. had helped me to realize that discipline in the CCC camp had to be. I had never reckoned I would be the Powder Monkey.

Q 5: Describe the trip to Idaho (not pertinent for the all-Idaho camps)? I could not remember the entire trip to Idaho. We came by train in a large group and we were replacements for those that went home after 6 months of experience.

Q 6: What was your first impression of Idaho in general and camp location in particular? How did it change over time? How did it change for the others in your crew? My impression of Idaho was it was barren, no trees, not like NH. Camp location (Gallagher) was just right, with scattered timber. I was now working with men of my age group except those that were my superiors. I became an assistant leader of our crew. We had a foreman (USFS) & crew leader.

Q 7: Describe the people you were stationed with. Where were they from, what were they like? The people that were in camp came from all walks of life. There were many

that changed their names when they signed up. Some from the big city had been in jail and I think that is why they came with fictitious names. The remainder of the camp was those that came from little towns like Catskill NY, Schoharie NY etc. and the Adirondack area. These people were not like the animals from the big city.

Q 8: What was the hierarchy of the camp (military vs. civilian)? The Military in camp was the boss. What activity went on in camp after the men unloaded from their vehicles coming in from projects was mainly controlled by the military. The military staff was situated on one side of camp in buildings with the Forest Service across the street. Discipline was administered in camp by the army; usually a Captain or Lt. The aid station was manned by the doctor and CCC personnel. The forest service had classes in the evenings. They too had a main say dealing with discipline. The head of the forest dept. in camp was the Superintendent who was Mr. Englemann (at Gallagher).

Q 9: What was the working relationship between other crewmembers, foremen, and camp administrators? What interaction was there between different camps? I observed good relationships between the foreman, other crewmembers and the camp administration. The forest service and the army worked well together, the army during some big fires dropped food to kitchens on the perimeter of big fires. We hardly knew there were other camps around. I had never met another member from another camp in Boise or other towns.

Q 10: Were you aware of any conflicts, political maneuvering among the different agencies involved? Explain. If there were any conflicts; I had not known it.

Q 11: Describe the various camps in Idaho where you were stationed (location, physical layout, features/amenities, etc.). Our camp at Gallagher (on the South Fork of the Payette River, 8 mi. east of Garden Valley) was a winter camp and summer camp was at Warm Lake. The Gallagher camp was a housing type of structure of wood barrack. The lay out was about as perfect one could design and I do think the USFS had much to do in the layout and location. The camp at Warm Lake was a pyramidal tent camp with Rec. Hall, kitchen-dining hall, latrine-showers of wood building construction. We fought fires at Warm Lake country which was our main purpose there I believe. I believe there was some timber stand improvement there. Roads were maintained. I was crew leader by this time and our job when not going to a fire (our crew was #1 crew all picked boys) was building wood bridges. We all learned our job and we were all country boys. Part of the crew would cut timbers for these bridges. John Graham our foreman was a great "dad" to us. The trees cut were in an area where improvement was to be made. Some of the bed logs would be large Douglas fir 3.5 foot diameter. I was the adz man and loved it! I'm writing this using the back of a book for a table. I hope you can read it.

I also was in a spike camp in Challis in the East Fork of the Salmon building trail in to the hot springs area. There were many salmon during runs. We ate salmon like crazy. Finally towards the end of my beautiful stay (1940 Oct. or Nov. ?) I was moved to Salmon National Forest. I did more blasting of rock, building cow trails (mud cap and

drill) Feb. 20, 1941. I joined the US Army as a demolition man, bridges (steel), buildings, and whatever! I came out 1945 in July! Alive and well.

Q 12: What was the building site like at the time of construction (was it already cleared)?

Q 13: Who was responsible for designing the buildings? Did the crew work from drawings or plans?

Q 14: What types of trees were preferred for the logs? Where did you go to acquire the logs? How were the logs prepared for construction?

Q 15: Where was the quarry located? How was the stone quarried? What tools did you use? Quality/workability of the stone?

Q 16: Who did the mortar work? How was the mortar prepared?

Q 17: What was the division of labor between log work, stone cutting, mortar work, etc? Who directed the various phases of construction?

Q 18: Did any enrollees already have these typed of skills when they arrived? If not, how were they trained? Many of the CCC camp buildings in NY State were constructed by the WPA Works Progress Administration. I cannot answer your questions from #12 through #18 because the camp structures were already there upon my arrival there as I said before. The Forest Service had to have a hand in the design with the Army's approval and it appears to me that contracts may have been let by these agencies to construct buildings. The flooring in each pyramidal tent at Warm Lake was permanent fixture there each year I was there. We pitched our tents when we moved in. A contractor or local WPA either built toilets, showers, dining hall and kitchen.

Q 19: Describe any spike camps associated with your main camp. Did your camp ever move? I described the spike camp at Challis. This was mainly a tent camp with 20 – 25 men including cook and Forest Service personnel building trail.

Q 20: What specific job duties were you given? My job duties in the regular camp were Explosives Handler and Crew Leader. My first 6 months in the CCC were in the capacity enrollee to Assistant Leader. My training by the forest service as an explosives man was going on constantly in classes in the evening. The training was mostly safety in handling explosives with placement of drill holes, loads, springing of holes, storage of explosives magazines, instantaneous caps, delay caps, testing circuits when using electrical caps. Some emphasis on types of roads and elementary layout. After 6 months an enrollee would normally be sent home. I wanted to stay so the Forest Service adopted me as a local enrolled man (LEM). Each 6 months was served by me wanting to stay on. This is how I was able to stay on with a “generous” \$45.00/month. There were very few on this class because not everyone wanted this job I had. Two of my crew each time trained to assist me even in making primers. Never had a man from the big city to help me. Mr. Barone worked on my crew for a while as a Jack Hammer man. He was a very good driller but I lost him when he too became a leader on a crew scaling rock.

Q 21: How much were you paid? How was payment received? Enrollee received \$30.00/ mo., crew leaders \$45.00.

Q22: Describe the food, clothing received? The food was not always good. The food on the fires was very good. The Forest Service was responsible for much of the food I believe. The clothing supplied by the army was of good quality as you can see the long johns in the photo.

Q 23: What medical attention was available to you? Educational opportunities? Religious opportunities? Leisure-time activities? Medical attention was fairly good. I wouldn't say it was very good with the experience that I've had.

Q 24: Were there any minorities in your camp? How were they treated? There were no minorities in our camps where I was.

Q 25: How was the camp received by the local community? Your personal reception? Many locals did not like the CCC boys. In town they were judged by those that were few that came from "different" environments. As for speaking for myself, I had no trouble getting acquainted.

Q 26: How long was your commitment? Did many sign up for additional time? I stayed almost 3 years but being accepted as a local enrollee I was able to continue. Very few stayed on. I don't think they could have stayed on unless they re-enrolled locally.

Q 27: How did having worked in the CCC affect you life, future professional choices? Would you recommend it to young people today? I think it may have altered my life in a way of likeness for the outdoors. I chose my future for the work outdoors, I had all the opportunity for a professional career in forestry but I chose the NY State Ranger School. I have worked for the Soil Conservation Service for 9 years and 22 years for the Army Corp of Engineers as a construction inspector and Party Chief on survey. All my experiences with CCC were very helpful. One never ceases to learn.

Q 28: How would you describe your overall experience? Would you do it over again? Would you recommend it to young people today? Under our present living conditions it would be very difficult to do this once again. Camps such as they were would not be tolerable by the society of today. I would do it again only if I were reincarnated.

Q 29: Have you been to reunions over the years? There were no reunions as far as I know.

Q 30: What were your attitudes about forests and forest management? What effect did working for the CCC have on those attitudes? I do know now that our forests will never vanish with the proper management. We have more forests than we had when our pioneers traveled from the east to west plowing and clearing land which now has been planted and rejuvenated to growth and properly managed by the agency of our government.

Q 31: [for foremen, administrators – many of the above questions may also be pertinent] No comment.

Q 32: What training were you given for your specific duties? I have mentioned my training in a previous question.

Q 33: How did you handle discipline for those under you? First one must discipline him own self. For some it is very easy, for others, difficult. You have to treat all those under you the same. In dangerous work situations, such as explosives one has to preach safety every day.

Q34: how did the local community receive the camp/crew? People in most towns were unhappy with the CCC because of the rudeness of some of the city slickers but as time went on people tolerated this behavior.

Q 35: What was the working relationship between the various agencies responsible for administering the program? I don't know how it went on between agencies out of camp. The Army and the Forest agencies got along quite well. I think our main gripe in camp was food. With the change of personnel so often I think it made it difficult to hold on to the good cooks, etc.

Subject; Answer to 35 questions.

Suzie (Osgood):

I hope you can read this. If you need more information on any question and I can answer it, let me know. Suzie; the rest will follow as I have time. Be patient. Signed Bill P. From 12 to 18 as I marked these, I did not answer. I don't think the CCC constructed any barracks. I think they were constructed by local labor or contract work. This is what I think. I could be in error.

Sue:

In the meantime you should contact Mr. Reay in regards to the Scott Mountain Road etc. I'm going to contact Barone to see if he remembers anything. As for Garden Valley and Lowman Road I'm sure activity was mainly and all by the Gallagher Camp over the years. The crew out of Camp Gallagher also worked in the Deadwood area. Will contact Barone!

Bill Potkovick note: Replacement copy of 42 photo will follow with others you may not have. Will Charlie Lambert house be saved from demolition? I told you I stayed there with Charlie and Irene on furlough from Ft. Lewis.

Note: This is a typed copy of his handwritten letter.

Note: A Cascade News article on Fri. Oct. 23, 1936 states the Warm Lake CCC camp was closed for the winter last Fri. and the boys were entrained on a special for Reno NV Sat.