

CCC INTERVIEW WITH LEE COX

Date: June 5, 2002

Location: Winterset, Iowa

Interviewer: Larry Wilson

DNR: Where is your hometown?

Lee: Winterset, Iowa.

DNR: How old were you when you joined the CCC's?

Lee: 17.

DNR: What did you do before going to the CCC's?

Lee: Farming.

DNR: Where did you enroll in the CCC's?

Lee: In Winterset. Then they took me to Guthrie Center and I was at Springbrook Camp. Guy Ford drove me and another fellow or two over to Guthrie. We had a lot of kids from Arkansas. We got small pox vaccinations.

DNR: You spent all your time there?

Lee: Yes.

DNR: What was your first day at the camp like?

Lee: They gave us bedding and regular army fatigues, with two wool shirts and two pair of wool pants.

DNR: Did they give you a shaving kit?

Lee: No.

DNR: Was there anything you brought with you to the camp?"

Lee: No. Just what I was wearing.

DNR: Was there anything you weren't allowed to bring?

Lee: No.

DNR: How were you assigned to a barracks?

Lee: They just said go to barracks number three.

DNR: It was a wooden barracks and not a tent?

Lee: Wooden barracks. The bath house we built is still there. The old kitchen was still there, when I visited. The old garbage pit was still there.

DNR: Who furnished your bedding?

Lee: They did.

DNR: Do you remember the names of other bunkmates?

Lee: No. Just one but he's dead.

DNR: How did everyone get along in the barracks?

Lee: Pretty well. We tipped a bed over on a bunk and this guy fell into the butt can. So after that we called him 'Butt Can Squeable.'

DNR: How was the food?

Lee: It was doggone good. I got a job preparing the cook's stove. I carried the coal. I dumped the ashes and cleaned it up.

DNR: Were there any special holiday meals?

Lee: I don't know.

DNR: When was payday?

Lee: End of the month. We kept half of it and the other half went home.

DNR: What did you spend your money on?

Lee: We had a rec hall. We would buy ice cream and pop.

DNR: Did you have days off?

Lee: Weekends. The trucks would take us to games in town.

DNR: Was the Sabbath observed?

Lee: Yes.

DNR: Were there sports?

Lee: They took us to basketball games.

DNR: Were there any personal conflicts?

Lee: No.

DNR: If they existed how would they taken care of?

Lee: They would go to the captain. They all got along pretty well.

DNR: How was disciplined issued?

Lee: I don't know.

DNR: Did you have bunk beds?

Lee: Single cots. There were about 20 of us.

DNR: Were there any educational or vocational opportunities available?

Lee: No.

DNR: What kind of ditches did you help dig?

Lee: I don't remember if it was water lines or sewer lines. We hauled sand out there on the ice. We used wheelbarrows and shovels to pile it up on the ice. Then they would take poles with chisels on the bottom, and they would pile sand in a square and then cut the square and it would tip over into lake. The lake was already there. The bathhouse had already been built. We cut sod and rolled it by hand on different farms. Then we would slope the banks on their ditches and we would lay sod in there and drive stakes to hold the sod in place.

DNR: Did you work on the bathhouse?

Lee: No.

DNR: Did you learn any new skills?

Lee: No.

DNR: Do you remember any of your leaders?

Lee: Just (inaudible) the camp commander.

DNR: Did you get along okay with your leaders?

Lee: Yes.

DNR: How did you get your work assignments?

Lee: They would assign so many guys to a truck and take them out to a project.

DNR: How did you get your tools?

Lee: From the truck.

DNR: What was the tool house?

Lee: Where we kept the tools.

DNR: Do you remember any of your coworkers?

Lee: No.

DNR: Were there both country and city kids in the camp?

Lee: I don't think so.

DNR: Were there any minorities in the camp?

Lee: I don't think there was.

DNR: Did you learn any specific skills?

Lee: To keep your mouth shut mostly.

DNR: Were there any injuries?

Lee: No.

DNR: Were you ever injured?

Lee: I had pneumonia. I spent one week in the hospital.

DNR: How were people helped if injured?

Lee: They had a dentist that visited the camp.

DNR: Were there any diseases?

Lee: No.

DNR: Were there rodent or insect problems?

Lee: No.

DNR: Did you do any outside work for the local community?

Lee: No.

DNR: Did you have any contacts with the outside community?

Lee: No.

DNR: Do you remember any Masonic or similar organizations in the camp?

Lee: No.

DNR: Did you have contact with any women in the camp?

Lee: No.

DNR: Were there any problems with the local boys and the CCC boys?

Lee: No.

DNR: How did the local community view the camp?

Lee: Okay.

DNR: Did you have any odd or strange experiences at the camp?

Lee: No.

DNR: What did you learn from being in the camp?

Lee: Maturity. Learning to get along with others. Respect for people's property.

DNR: Did the experience change your life?

Lee: It did me some good. Wayne Howard borrowed my hat, and he got liquored up a little bit, and he cut across a pasture, and my hat fell in the creek. He brought it back.

DNR: What did you do when you came back from the C's?

Lee: I just started working on the farms as a day labor. In my middle 50's I stopped because of my back operation for a broken disk. October of '42 I went into the army for 39 months. Basic training in Oregon and California. Then we went over to the Pacific. I was in on the invasion of the Philippines and Okinawa. I was a radioman. I was a forward observer. I come out okay. I got out in January '46. I come back home. I got married in '48. I was off work for ten months because of my back. I started working for a grain, feed and fertilizer business. I started working construction for eight years. Then I got a job with an engineering company. I worked for 12 years. Then I retired from Fawn Engineering. I retired in '84. We've been married 54 years. You know I never finished eighth grade. I welded there mostly. My wife worked there 20 years as a welder.

Updated by Larry Wilson August 11, 2005 after talking with Lee Cox.

