

The Story of My C.C.C. Days

It was a cold windy day in April 1934 when I was signed up at the County Seat Steele, N.Dak. for the Civilian Conservation Corps. I was one of nine children who had graduated from Hi-School a year earlier. And it seemed like the right thing to do.

The drouth had been with us for several years; crops would blow away and people would replant but to no avail. The winds just kept blowing and the sand would pile up like snow drifts at fence lines and around buildings. We were getting some emergency food at the county seat.

I took a bus to Bismarck, N.D. and was picked up by a G.I. truck and taken to Ft. Lincoln, a Cavalry Post to be housed and feed till I was assigned to a CCC Company which turned out to be Co. 795 located at New England, N.D. Sixty five miles south of Dickenson, N.D. The company had just returned from California 21 April 1934 and needed bodies to bring the strenght of the Company up to par which was two hundred enrollees.

We received all our shots and clothing at Ft. Lincoln and were loaded in G.I. trucks and taken to our new home Co. 795 at New England, N.D. We arrived in the afternoon and were taken to a plot of land at the out skirt of the city with stacks of tents, beds, and sibley stoves. We were organized into squads of six and told to put up a tent and get our bunks into the tent and the stove set up. Then we were told to go to the supply house and pick up a mattress tick and go fill it with straw then get our blankets. ~~and~~ Finally we were told to go to supper or Chow by the Camp Bugler; we did every thing by the bugle. I suppose you are wondering where we got the straw from. Q Well there just happen to be a freshly threshed wheat field so the straw stack was there for our use.

The next morning after breakfast we were given our job assignments. Mine was to be as second cook on the morning shift. Others were assigned to building a small dam to hold back all the rain or snow water that would accrue. While working as second cook I got pneumonia and was sent back to Ft. Lincoln for treatment. While there I did get well and was assigned to Co. K Cavlery Kitchen staff to learn military cooking and food management. When I finally got back to camp they were looking for a tractor driver and since I came from the farm they put me on the tractor to pull a fresno scrapper which we moved dirt up to the dam. A couple weeks later they needed a small crew of five enrollees to go to Dickenson to work on the Heart River Dam. We were housed at the Fair Ground east of the city. When we finished that job we joined a larger group of twenty five enrollees and placed in a Spike Camp at the Hettinger Air Port. We were still living in tents. Here we were building small Dams on dry streams i.e. a

tributary of the Grand River with the hope that summer rains and spring snow thaws would soon fill them to overflowing. From this conservative town we would travel to Lemmon S.D. for dances and fun. To get there we would often steal ride on the fast flyer train on the Soo line. The best place to ride is behind the coal tender in the blind which is one half of the connecting booth between two regular coaches. It was a cold and dirty ride, cinders were flying all over the place.

While working in the Hettinger Area with the pile driving crew and accident happened that could of been the end of me. There is what is called the pit. It is the place under the pile driving frame work where the guide man is located. My job was to use a long crew bar which I would stick in the ground and press against the pile to hold it in the groove of the pile next to it. On top of the frame work was a five hundred pound cast iron driver which would be pulled up in the air by fifteen enrollee by a heavy rope, as it hit the top twenty feet up an automatic release would allow it to come thundering down between its guides and strike the pile driver cap and in turn drive the pile into the ground approximately six to ten inches depending on the dryness of the ground. This one time as it came down the pile shattered and the driver came down in the pit. It struck the crow bar I was holding and wrenched it out of my hands with such force that my arms fell to my sides and were numb - I could not move them. The foreman, McBride, took me over to a truck set me in the cab and there I sat until we got back to camp in the evening. We had no doctor or emergency equipment so I was put to bed someone feed me my supper and after a good night sleep my arms were back to normal, so back to the pit I went no one else would take the job. Had that happened today 911 would have been called and I would have been put in some trauma center. Soon it was October and our work was completed at Hettinger and the Dam the main camp was constructing at Mott on the Cannon Ball River was completed so we were able to leave North Dakota for Little Rock Arkansas and our winter camp.

Riding through the different states to Little Rock in our Pullman car gave us a new experience and appreciation for what life can be all about. Most of us had never been out of the state we grew up in and most had never seen the inside Pullman Coach and how you sleep in what was once during the day a chair. We arrived in Little Rock, Ark. October the fourth, 1934 and were taken to the Fair Grounds of the state a very large permanent installation at the outskirts west of the city. The Main Fair ground headquarters building became our home the whole company under one roof was very special treat. These fair grounds had all the fair ground main intertainment equipment such as faris wheel, merry go-rounds etc., a large dance pervilian and huckster stands.

The street car line from the city came right to our gate so we could go

town town to shop, shows , and dances. It was from one of these dance halls we were late getting to the street car station and one of my friends was trying to put his coat on as we ran. A police car pulled up along side and took him to jail we couldn't understand why. I asked and the officer said shut up or I'll take you in to, so we went home and reported it to the officer on duty. Our Captain went down and got him released they already had him booked for the chain gang. He was so glad to get to get back to camp. Not to far about a mile north of the park was a place called Pulaski Height where there was a show house where we could go to see up to date pictures for ten cents. We made it a point to eat early and run for the show hall. Between going to shows we went to school at the Little Rock Central Hi-school and were taking typing, shorthand, aeronautics in fact they had a full sized airplane and hanger in the school. As a result of our taking aviation we the ten students were given a ride in a Ford Tri-motor passenger plane 1930 vintage. What a thrill that was to see the city from the air. As we were deplaning we got to see Col. Roscoe Turner land a new Army Air Corps P-12 Pursuit plane. Aviation was my subject ever since Charles Lindberg soloed the Atlantic 27 May 1927, what a dare devil he and his wife were. Now for our reason for being here it was to construct a park for people to enjoy. It was located about three miles south and west of fair park. It was about ten acres of land with a few trees on it. We made a lake, pavillion, rock falls, walking paths, lavitorys, a bridge over the lake which needed the cement finished and why I was picked to do the finish work I'll never know, so I did two sides with all the swirls etc. I also worked in the garage doing maintenance on the trucks and helped the blacksmith make and sharpen stone tools. It required a lot of stone cutting tool since we used a lot of flat rock during the building of the park. The rock was hauled from Ft. Smith many miles north of Little Rock.

In the spring we would go swimming with the cotton mouths, and sit on logs in the woods and got many chigger bits which ended up in sores that need medical attention. Bath tub ginn was readily available near camp, but it was so terrible no one tried to drink it. On week ends we were taken sight seeing in our G.I. truck out to the cotton fields, swanky hunting clubs yes even to Hotsprings Ark. where we got to see the city and got a glimpse of Dillinger and his limo. We also took a trip up to the White river north west of L.R. here we got a veiw of how people lived in the country. House and barn where under one roof with a driveway between them. We also saw large poaching of fish from the river. I asked our guide to show us a still but he said that was to dangerous.

We got our first taste of black eyed peas and sow belly oh yes sorgum to. Grits to be good should be served with milk and sugar and many of us northern kids ate it that way. Generally our mess sergeat got the hang of what the guys liked and it was served.

We all had a chance to meet southern belles since they came to

our dances at the park. It fact when it was time to go home many guys were discharged so they could go get married and take their new bride north some stayed in L.R.

I use to go out to the rich gun clubs and pull target on Sundays, to make a litle extra money to spend..On Sunday evenings we would go to a southern baptist church near our camp for singing and just talking.

During the flooding of the Arkansas River in the spring of of 1935, we helped the National Guard to get the people out of the flooded area we loaded their house hold stuff in the trucks and got them to higher ground.

While I was at Fair Park my brother Johannes came to visit me he had been in the Hotsprings Military Hospital for treatment of infection in his let arm. His visit was short because the next day a truck from the Fayettevile Ark came and picked him up.

I was late in the spring time and we had no orders to go back to North Dakota but our work there was soon over and we got our schedule to leave the 2nd of July. We were hauled to the railsroad station and loaded on Pullman coaches and the way we went northward to home sweet home, leaving our southern home that we had enjoyed for eight months.

We arrived in Bismarck the 4th of July and the next day I was assigned as staff Car Driver for our Capt. Allen K. Davis who had been reassigned as eastern North Dakota Camp Inspector and again why me. I never did ask him about that. So he with his wife and son departed in their Olsmobile and I in my brand new Plymouth G.I. sedan for Robinson to see my family the Lelands. I left there late that evening and drove to Larimor to Co. 764 C.C.C. where I was assigned for housing, meals and monthly pay, a whole \$5.00. The captain lived at Grand Forks, N.D. about 40 miles east of my assigned company. Each day after breakfest i would drive to Grand Forks pick up the Captain take him to a barber shop for a shave and trim. He was a neat guy breeches, puttys, sam brown belt, and capt's, field hat or garrison cap he was tops for dress and class. On several occations I was called out at night to take him to a camp where fire had happened. Nothing major but he always wanted to see first hand what had happened.. He would ask me to mix with the en-rollees at camp and find out what things were like in camp. This tour of duty was the best for me. During that fall General Boles from the seventh corps area visited our district and I had the privilage of hauling him and the Capt. around to several of the camps in our area. Late in October the Captain was reassigned to Co 2763 at Watford City, ND and further to move the company to Mystic, S.D., in the Black Hill. He took off in the Plymouth for Bismarck and told me to stay and help

his wife get packed and drive his Olsmobile with his family to Mystic S.D. On the way we run into an early snow storm so bad we had to lay over at Buffalo, S.D. it was storming so bad the state crews said you cannot go any further. We stayed at a S.D. state representative home. Had supper and breakfast with the family. Captain Davis and family had an apartment in Rapid City and I went to Camp Mystic where I became second Camp driver and would haul mail; mostly taking the Capt where ever he wanted to go..I guess he was use to my driving and caring for a vehicle. Our job here at Mystic was to thin trees and trails. On week ends we would visit ares of the hills i.e. Rushmore National Memorial, Dead Wood, the Eye of the needle and Pig Tail Hi-way, Pres. Hoovers Summer Retreat ner Sylvian Lake. Crazy Horse Monument was just being painted on the rocks and Capt. Anderson came here to launch his try for the hot Air Ballon Altitude record. As I remember He had some difficulty after launch and gave up. Here I was given an opportunity to go to a truck drivers school at Ft. Meade, S.D. and won a five inch star to put on the grill of my 1933 Dodge G.I. truck. Our stay he re was very short right after Christmas we got our orders to move to Salmon, Idaho the 12th of January 1936. So we started to get ready to leave the banana belt of S,D. Up comes a first class train with lots of box cars and pullman cars for us to live in for two days as we rolled toward Armstead, Montana accross snow covered midwest toward the mountain area. At Armstead we were transferred to the Armstead Salmon Line which goes west over the mountains into the Lemhi valley thence to Salmon, Ida. This train was the most delapidated train I have ever seen. The passanger coaches had 2X10 planks for seats, there were old coal oil lamps that hardly gave out one candle power, this was winter and eventide. The heat in the coach was an old cast iron potbell witch put out hardly any heat so we were cold before we got going. About twenty five miles west of town going up about a five percent grade the back half of the train broke lose and started rolling back down toward Armstead and the emergency brake would not work. The engineer aparently sensed the light load and looked back to see what was wrong. He came to a screeching halt and sped back toward our free running train and caught up locked in stoped and the way we went up the mountain with many switch back, Going on down the valley we finally arrived at the Salmon Station to 12 inches of snow on the platform and several tables of doughnut and hot chocolate, boy was that a treat. I'm happy for kind thinking women who did this for us. We were then loaded into forest and GI trucks for the 60 miles down the Salmon River the "River of No Return" to Ebenezer Bar our new Camp ground Called Camp F-401. Since I have left this area, study about ancient civilization has revealed that the earliest people on the continnent made their home on this bar the mouth of Ebenezer Creek. In this area we were only three miles from the

wilderness Area of Idaho. At this forest service camp our job was to continue building the road down the river toward Riggins Idaho, who were building the road toward us. This road building was real slow going because of almost solid rock at least 80% rock which meant a lot of jack hammers and blasting. The morning after my arrival the captain said Leland you and Thompson the company clerk are going to Pocatello to a company clerk school which lasted for one week. When we got back to camp the Captain sent me back to Pocatello Headquarters to attend a swimmers resque class because we where so close to a fast rapid filled river, as long as I was at Camp F-401 I never did have to use it. But while I was at the resque school I was asked to drive a truck in a convoy to Tearace Springs in the north west corner of Yellowstone. It was in the middle of winter and there was a lot of snow, the snow plows managed to keep the road open to the camp, but very little work was being done, but it was a beautiful sight and trip. Upon returning to camp I took up my job as a payroll clerk, camp power plant maintenance person and ambulance and second string GI truck driver and the Capitan checked me out on the Colt 45 and I became the pay roll driver.

In the summer our camp was split up three ways, one a spike camp north of the river and one camp south of thre river and the balance working on tdhe road. These spike camps where high in the mountains building fire trails and maintaining fire watches in tower high enough so they covered a lot of terratory. By tri-angulation they could spot the location of a lightin strike and if fire put a small crew of men there to put it out. We need more of that today and we woul'n't have so much timber burned up. I was at camp and in conjuction with the superintendent would haul supplies, shows etc to the spike camp.

Our camp Doctor Captain Stone and I had to cut off the foot of a young man who got his foot in t he way of a eight foot rolling stone. We used a 1918 field kit a very primitive piece of surgical equipment. I applied the ether thru the old drip mask system. I also helped him with tonsil removals and hauledf oxygen for pneumonia patients. Appendectomys we would transport to Hamilton City Hospital in Montana about one hundred twenty miles from camp.

For camp intertainment we had sports, weekly shows, monthly visits from the Chaplan and of corse we would take as many enrollee as wanted to go to town on Saturday nites, then there was a dance hall at North Fork about 35 miles up the river. We had a small band from camp that played at that roadhouse. One night I was walking around the grounds and heard a young woman yell for help, so I ran in the direction of the voice and there was one young lady over the side of the bridge of the northfork river being held by her friend., I got her back on the bridge and sent

her back to the dance hall. Never asked her name or bothered to find out who she was. Her friend told me that she had a fight with her boyfriend so she was going to end it all.

We finhod and swam in the river a lot, where the Middle Forks of the Salmon River met the main river was a real strong and deep river and I use to enjoy swimming down along the wall of the canyon it was cold as ice and clear as air. I was a strong swimmer so at Salmon City there were some rapids above the bridge and I decided swim them. . I got tossed around and skinned up a bit, but servived it.

At the Camp Our Educational Adviser Mr.Virgil Enke through the auspicious of the federal government provided us with all kinds of education and training. I used to assist him in in the class rooms. We had all kinds of mechanical courses from Auto Mechanic to Diesel Engine repair, Photograghy, typing, carpentry, accounting, bookeeping etc. When the men needed to apply for jobs out side our camp invioriment Mr. Enke would assist them in preparing the letters. Many of our bulldozer operators left camp for jobs at the big dams that were being buildt around the west. By the way there was also a class in aviation which I took and every one of the classes that was available.. I have and envelope full of certificates. Oh yes,I became First Sergeant of the company in 1938 amd served in this position until I was discharged in March of 1940 to take a job as a car mechanic in Blackfoot, Idaho, It was arranged for me by our Chaplan swing Wilson with a Captains rating. He brought religion to the camp once a month and I use to assist him also. Remember all this time our families at home were recieving twenty five dollars a month and as enrollees we received five dollars except in my case I received fifteen dollars which all the leaders of the company received.

Best of all we had a mess Sergeant Paul Musch from near Minot, N.D. who was able to put together tdhe best meals any company ever had. Times like Christma and other major holidays the meals were super. We had a rulling in our Company that you could not go to supper meal without your class A uniform on, on hot summer evenings I think the men hated it and me for inforcing the rule. We did have and orderly group of young men and our kitchen and dinning room were emaculate.

Since we were in a canyon a half mile or more deep we got lots of exercise hiking and playing volley ball and tennis. We had two courts which I personnally dug out of the hillside just above our parade grounds. It took a lot of time because I could only use the power shovel, dump truck and bulldozer on week end and Sundays. Hauling the clay from thirty five miles up the river one load at a time which my buddy Tyson our first aid person and I personally loaded with shovel. Many of the other enrollees when they saw it was a serious project helped make it a success. I think our camp way out there in the wilderness was the cleanest

and neatest camp in the whole district.

The Forest Service established a mountain rescue team because in the late fall of the year there were so many hunters who came down to the end of the road to hunt deer and would get lost. The forest service would get the call from the families and our team would go out to find them a group leader by the name of Carlson and I were chosen to be members of the team since both of us were avid hikers and endurance men. We would have to trudge through snow up to our waists in some places. Our wool G.I. shirts would have more frost on them like many of you have seen on sweaty horses in the winter. It was always a great sense of accomplishment when we would find the lost hunters in good health.

The C.C.C.'s increased the wealth of the nation with all the difference projects they completed and I believe most are standing today. We probably were the largest conservation organization in the world we left legions of completed projects and some uncompleted e.g. Salmon River Road that I know of.

Unbeknown to us was that we were part of the largest pool of young men trained in camp disciplines and ready to go any place. Which most of them did volunteered for service in the Army Navy or Marines. Most of us did not know that Camp David was once a CCC camp and Roosevelt like it so much that it became the refuge for him and all the presidents since. GOD bless Franklin Delino Roosevelt for his vision at that time in the history of our beloved Country.

My six years in the CCC's was one of the greatest times of my life and personal growth. I have no regrets only praise for the officers I served under and the men I served with. Maybe its time we reinstitute the C.C.C. program of Roosevelts' era yes right now would be the time.

[Signature]

Harold Perry Leland

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