

**Oral History Interview with Andy Daino
Civilian Conservation Corps, 1937
by Thomas Greene, NPS intern,
March 12, 2003,
Transcribed by Thomas Greene 2003**



This oral history interview of Andy Daino, is taking place on March 12, 2003 at Fort Hancock on Sandy Hook in the History House. I am Thomas Greene, a student at Monmouth University, I will be conducting the interview.

Question: Good morning Mr. Daino. Thank you for doing this interview with me.

Answer: Good morning.

Q: Okay. Let's start off with a few general questions. When and where were you born?

A: I was born in New Brunswick, New Jersey on May 18, 1915.

Q: What school did you graduate from?

A: New Brunswick High School in New Brunswick.

Q: Did you have any fond memories of your life growing up in New Brunswick?

A: Well, I could remember working on the WPA. In them years, the Work Project....whatever it was, and that's how I made a living. And I think we... I don't know if it was \$30.00 a month or....then I became an assistant boss anyway over a group of thirty men. We worked alongside the Raritan River in Highland Park, and we built a park there. Johnson's Park. Johnson's Park. And it's right across the river from Johnson & Johnson. Then, I became an amateur boxer for three years. Then from there I enlisted into the Civilian Conservation Corps with my two brothers. My brothers were spread out, one in Metuchen and one up in North Jersey somewheres. And I was sent here to Fort Hancock. That was back in late '36, and I just loved Fort Hancock. I enjoyed living here. I think it was the best part of my life. I enjoyed it. And I reminisce and come here. I live up near the lighthouse in Highlands, and at least two or three times a week my wife and I drive through Sandy Hook real slow. At one time I was going so slow that a ranger stopped me. He says, "What's the matter buddy? Are you having trouble?" I said, "No. I lived here about sixty years ago and I'm reminiscing. I think maybe I see some of my friends or something (laughing to himself)." It makes me feel good to go slow and think about the old times and the good times that I spent here. It was a great life. I enjoyed it. Then later on, after being a leader, I had a crew. An we done a lot of work building roads, cutting down brush, and cleaning up and dismantling old gun pits. And we had a balloon hangar which is still here. A balloon hangar. And that's where we kept our trucks and ploughs and utilities. We were called by a whistle from our, well we called him a sergeant. He was a leader. Postempski, who is now deceased. Postempski was in charge and he had his own quarters where the clothing department was right behind his office where we were issued our clothing. Green clothing. And the whistle would blow at six in the morning and got us all out of the barracks standing at attention outside in the cold and warmth. And after roll call, we got back in our barracks and had to repair or clean our beds real neat. I mean neat. Without a wrinkle in them! Because they were checked to see if they were all set right, and our bunk area had to be perfectly clean. And we had, in our barracks we had two pot belly stoves. Big black stoves that we burnt coal

in. We had a big coal bin in the back of our barracks. And that's where we got our coal and brought it in and that's how we kept warm by these two big pot belly stoves. Then we were sent out to different areas to do work. And where I'm sitting now was at one time Captain Sheppard's quarters. The History House. He had a little daughter by the name of Annie. She was real good to me because right next to it, between Captain Sheppard's house here, the History House, and the movies my crew built a tennis court which is now dismantled. And little Annie used to make lemonade for me and my crew and bring it out to the front steps, and we'd have lemonade with little Annie. And she moved from here to somewhere in Virginia. I think Fort Monroe. And occasionally I got cards from her. Valentine cards, Christmas cards, and she kept sending me for a couple of years, and after that, that was it. I don't know what ever happened to her or her folks. We had a canteen where we had a pool table, ping pong tables, and they had food there and soda. Naturally, you had to buy it. And that's where we enjoyed ourselves when we had our time off. After working and eating, and that's where we hung out- at the canteen. And we had a music box there and on Friday nights we had girls come to visit us from Highlands. And they weren't allowed nowhere but in the canteen and that was it. And then the jitney took them back home to Highlands. No foul play of any kind. In fact, I married one of the girls that came to visit me from Highlands. She is now deceased. She died in the '60s. We had a mess hall that really put out some terrific food, and on holidays we got a big treat. On Sundays, we had breakfast and dinner and then they gave us bag lunch. Instead of supper we had a bag lunch. So, that meant ...gave us a break that right after dinner we could do what we wanted for the whole afternoon. We didn't have to set up to go to the mess hall. We had our lunch bags with us. And in sports we had fellas that played basketball and baseball. And we didn't have a team but Fort Hancock had a team. I think it was C-Battery. That was mostly where we... where all of the athletes were at, the C-Battery. That was the first one as you come in. C-Battery. I can't think of what it is now. It's across from the Academy. And we had baseball players and we had basketball players that played with the C-Battery against other teams, Fort Monmouth and other teams. And I think Jack Dempsey was here at one time, and some of the Yankee players were here. I can't recall the names of the baseball players, but I do know they were here. And I could recall Jack Dempsey being here and a lot of movie actors and actresses used to come to visit. It was very enjoyable. I hated to leave, but I fell in love with the girl and we got married in November when I left here. And my commanding Officer, Captain Sheppard... Captain Myers! Captain Harry Myers was the commanding officer of the CC camp. And he gave me a blank and \$25.00 for my present, (laughing) for a wedding present. And the funniest part was I came from New Brunswick, and there was a lot of country around Rutgers and through there that I used to run around in, and I used to play golf here at Rutgers. Rutgers golf course, and naturally, I was used to poison ivy. When I came here to Fort Hancock, to CC camp, a lot of boys came from Newark and New York. Where I guess they didn't know what poison ivy was. So, when we took the cruise out to work the following day these kids were loaded with poison ivy, and at roll call in the morning they were complaining. And they all had to wait at the sergeant's quarters for the ambulance to come and pick them up and take them to the hospital. And they were loaded with poison ivy. I never saw anything like it (laughing). But then they enjoyed being at the hospital because they had terrific food at the hospital (laughs).

Q: What made you want to join the C.C.C.?

A: The C.C.C.s were I think, for families that needed help. We weren't on relief or welfare or anything. My father was a barber, and there was eight of us, six boys and two girls in the family. And naturally, it was pretty rough to take care of a family that size. The government made up this Civilian Conservation Corps, and like I say, the majority of them were kids that needed help. And me, with my five brothers, three of us came and got into the Civilian Conservation Corps, and it was a big help because they sent the money home. First, I think it was \$30.00. Then, I became assistant leader and made \$36.00. Then, I became a leader and made \$45.00 a month. Then I had friends here and soldiers, and they got a little teed off but they still liked me. We're still friends, but like I say, teed off because (laughing) they made \$21.00 a month and I made \$45.00 a month (still laughing).

Q: Did you know anything about Fort Hancock before you came here?

A: No. This was the first time I ever saw Fort Hancock. Yup.

Q: Did you have any idea of what types of jobs you would have to do?

A: No. We were never told anything of what we were supposed to do until we got here.

Q: And you said you were an assistant leader and then a leader.

A: Yeah.

Q: What did that entail doing?

A: Pardon?

Q: What did those titles entail? What responsibilities did they entail?

A: Well, you were in charge of the barrack. Then you were in charge of a group of men. They were all under you. You were in charge. You were like the foreman or assistant foreman. We had a foreman. We had, I think three foremen. One was a retired soldier, Sergeant Rasga, and one was from Middletown, Mr. Phraner. P-H-R-A-N-E-R, yeah. Then we had Lieutenant Blake was our doctor. We also had a doctor at camp. And a leader took charge of the group of men at work, whatever work we had to do, and he was in charge of the barrack to make sure everything was in perfect order. No fights of any kind or anything. And, excuse me, we had... the toughest part was when you got up in the morning no matter how cold it was... Well, we loved the warm weather. The cold part was when we had to come out of our barrack, and in the back we had a big shed. And it had a latrine where you went to the bathroom, and it had showers where you had to take your showers and shave. Well, some shaved, some didn't because a lot of them were too young to shave. But they had mirrors there, and you took your shower and you

had to run back into that barrack to keep warm in the wintertime. In the summer time you didn't mind.

Q: Do you feel what you did at Fort Hancock in the C.C.C. aided you in your future job or your future life? Did it teach you anything that you kept with you throughout your life?

A: Well, I was among a bunch of young fellas, so it made me feel good with a group of men, and as I became older then it did make me feel much better.

Q: But mainly you consider it one of the best periods of your life?

A: Yes. Yes, I still feel they were the best years of my life. I really enjoyed it here, yup.

Q: Were there ever any alerts of possible enemy attacks while you were here?

A: No, but I do recall we had hurricanes here, and I mean real bad hurricanes. I don't know if it was '37 or '38. And they got us up, they got us up in the middle of the night, and you couldn't see for the sand blowing so hard and so fast with that hurricane wind. And they got us up to keep the tracks clear, the railroad tracks clear. You had a locomotive that used to run from the end of Sandy Hook right down to the gate, and we had to keep the tracks clear. And that was quite a job. In the wintertime, I think it's one of the coldest places in the country (laughs). And then too, when the tracks froze with ice and snow we had crews that would be in front of the engine with hoses from the engine with steam to clean the tracks, to steam the ice off the tracks. And I could remember the engineer was Tom Concannon, and the fireman was Pike. Mr. Pike, yeah.

Q: Now, when you were here you were working with civilians. Were you also working with military personnel?

A: No. We weren't involved with the military no how. Only our officers were retired military men.

Q: And what building did you live in?

A: Pardon?

Q: What building did you live in?

A: In lived in the number one barrack. I lived in that number one barrack

Q: And where did you eat when you were here?

A: Right across from our barracks was a large mess hall.

Q: And while you were here, what kind of recreation and social gatherings did you take part in?

A: The only recreation that we had, like I said, was if you were an athlete you played ball or basketball with C-Battery. Then I had a ring built across from the headquarters. I had a platform, and I used it as a ring. And I was boxing instructor, and I had some of the military boys come there and I would teach them. And I don't recall... Around the corner from us I think there was three or four small bungalows that sergeants lived in. And one sergeant's son that I taught, I heard after I left here, he was in the Golden Gloves. I don't know how he made out. I taught him how to box. I can't recall his name, but the bungalows are all gone now, dismantled. The barracks, everything is dismantled, gone. Nothing left here but trees and shrubs. Oh, the hangar's still there. The balloon hangar.

Q: Did you attend religious services while you were here?

A: Yes, we went. We took the jitney, and it would drop us off in Highlands and go to the all ph church there, the Catholic Church, and some went to the Methodist Church, yeah.

Q: Did you go the beach while you were here?

A: Yes, mostly on weekends. On weekends we went to the beach. In fact, my crew built a road across the road that's there now coming into the Hook, coming into the base there's a road. And where we were situated, right off number one barrack, across the road, towards the beach, my crew built a road going towards the beach with red slag. I never saw it before, but occasionally my wife and I, we ride by here a couple of times a week just to reminisce, and the red slag I could see the road is still there. Yeah, but they have a barricade that you can't go from the road to the beach now. But the red slag is still there, yup.

Q: Did you ever take any trips to New York City while you were here?

A: Yes. Yes. Yes. Every Saturday morning, one of our trucks and drivers would pick us up and take us to the Coast Guard station. There was a G-boat. They called it a G-boat. I guess it meant government boat, G-boat, would go to, I don't recall, Fort Hamilton. I think it was Fort Hamilton, and the battery. It would drop us off, and then Sunday evening, late in the evening, you better be there to come back (laughs) or else you were stuck in New York. And I would take that on weekends because my aunt lived in Sunnyside, Long Island, and I would go visit her on weekends, my aunt and my cousins, and then come back Sunday evening. But that was a good ride. I could recall one of the other leaders and I taking a by home, discharged, because we don't know what it was. In them days I don't know what drugs was, but he used to take some kind of drugs. I don't recall what, but he was caught and acting very funny. So, he was discharged. And my buddy and I, the other leader, they took us to the G-boat on Saturday morning, and we dropped him off at his house. And we got there and a poor old Italian woman, his

mother... I don't recall just where it was, but I do recall him trying to give us a drink. "You want a Coke?" he said (laughing). We said, "Yeah." So, he came out with some kind of a bottle with black water in it. It wasn't Coke! So, we refused it, and we left. So, we don't know whatever happened to him.

Q: Did you know of any servants or minorities or women who worked here while you were here?

A: No, here wasn't any. Was there any minorities here?

Q: Yeah, minorities or servants or women?

A: Nope.

Q: Was there a humorous event that occurred or something especially funny that happened to you while you were here?

A: Just holidays and the canteen. We used to enjoy that. Our truck would pack us up here to the ball field and watch the football or baseball games or go to the gym and watch the basketball. We enjoyed that.

Q: Did you make a lot of friends while you were here?

A: Friends? Yes I did! They were all my friends (laughs). Yes I did! And we kept in touch for a few years, and then I don't know whatever happened we just fell apart.

Q: So, overall, you would say this was a fun place to be or boring? Fun, right?

A: Fun. Oh, I enjoyed it. I enjoyed it. It was a big help to my family...my parents, my family. It was a big help.

Q: Was there anyone here or anyone in your life who was like a role model for you, whether it be a relative or someone you met here or a movie star or athlete or something?

A: I can't recall anything. You have to ask me (laughs).

Q: Okay. Was there a place where you could go see movies and stuff on the Fort?

A: Yes. The movies were right alongside this History House. I think at that time it was five cents. Five or ten cents. And I can recall Rin-Tin-Tin being there. I enjoyed that. Then there was another cowboy here that used to be here. I can't recall his name. I'm going way back now with the cowboy. But we enjoyed going to the movies.

Q: Do you think that they should teach the New Jersey children about Sandy Hook and about the history and about the C.C.C. and about everything that went on?

A: Yes. Yes, because it's very, very important. Cause not only here, but the C.C.s were all over the country, and they helped clean up and build up different areas which a lot of them now are parks. And the boys done a lot of work, and they deserve a lot of credit. And it was very enjoyable, and it was very helpful.

Q: I guess as a closing question, what ... Go ahead.

A: Yes the children should be taught about Fort Hancock-Sandy Hook. It's very important, not only to the state of New Jersey, but it's very important to the whole country, especially during the war with the gun emplacements they had here to make it safe for our country. Where there were submarines right off our beach here. In fact, I heard that there was one submarine, German submarine, U-boat, that was caught right off the beach heading for New York City. And if the children and parents have time I think they should bring their children here to ride through or walk through and enjoy Fort Hancock and see what there is here. What some of the boys done to help our country stay the way it is, and for them to come and look at the light house and enjoy it because the lighthouse meant a lot to the shipping. A lot of the ships enjoyed having the lighthouse here so they knew where they were incase of fog or bad weather. I think all children of all ages should come to Fort Hancock and enjoy it and see what history there is here and what history was made here.

Q: So, you felt it was a priority to have Fort Hancock here to protect New York Harbor in case of any trouble?

A: Yes. Fort Hancock was very, very important, like I said, to this country, and how they took care of New York City and the harbor.

Q: And I guess we'll close with this question. You said that the children should learn about Sandy Hook and Fort Hancock.

A: Yes.

Q: If you had to tell them one piece of advice or something about your experiences, what would you leave with the future generations so that they could learn about Sandy Hook?

A: They should come here and see some of the buildings that the boys lived in and how they sacrificed themselves to help take care of this country. And also, I think they would enjoy the birds that we have here in Sandy Hook. I think there's a couple hundred varieties of birds that come to Sandy Hook, and I know they would enjoy walking the beaches and watching the birds.

Q: Thank you very much Mr. Daino for this interview. It was very interesting. It was a pleasure to have you speak to me, and I'm glad that you took the time out to do this and it will help whoever listens to this.

A: Thank you very much. I enjoyed it. I enjoyed being here, and I enjoyed talking about Sandy Hook. Like I said, it was the most enjoyable part of my life.