

[Transcriber's note: This transcript is from a set of two tapes Albert J. "A.J." Willett recorded himself, relating his experiences in the Civilian Conservation Corps. The recordings were done at various times and with different tape recorders, evidenced by changes in Willett's voice and the sound of the recordings themselves.]

BEGIN TAPE 1

START SIDE A

[Tape begins in mid-sentence]

. . . my experiences in the Civilian Conservation Corps, known as the CCC.

[Tape stops, then begins again. Speaker again begins in mid-sentence.]

. . . Hampton, Virginia, on September the 15th, 1920, in the county of Elizabeth City County. There was two girls; the first and the last were girls, and twelve boys in between. Four of us boys went to the CCC camp. Charlie was first in 1933. At that time you had, were sent to the Fort Monroe to spend ten days before you were sent to camp. One of the boys that went with my brother, Charles, thought they were going to war. One day he threw himself under a large truck at Fort Monroe and was crushed to death. Paul was next. He went to Grottoes, Virginia in 1934. I'm Albert and the next was I that went into camp, in 1935 in June. I stayed the rest of '35, '36, and until April in 1937. Grover was the last to go into camp, at SPN [sic] Number 10. Grover and I were on the Skyline Drive. He went into Camp when I was still in Camp 2.

I was number six of the twelve boys. I lived at 719 Locust Street until I was six years old. Then we moved to Mowrey Street, which is Pembroke Avenue now, near King Street in Hampton. Then my father built a new home for us at 520 Seally Avenue in Elizabeth City County. When I was fourteen years old, in March of that year I tried to go to the CCC camp. I was still in grammar school.

I went into the office in the old Hampton Court House and tried to sign up. Miss House, that was a neighbor of ours, was the lady who would sign you up to get in the CC camp. She said, "Albert," said, "You're only two years older than Grover and that'll only make you seventeen." I said, "No, he is sixteen years old," which he really was. I said, "That makes me eighteen years old." She said, "No, he's only fifteen." I said, "I'm sorry, but he's sixteen years old." But what she didn't know at the time was that I was two years younger than Grover, not older. So we were talking and the chief of police, Tommy Parker, he looked over and said, "Hey, boy!" He talked out of the side of his mouth. "Come over here." He asked me if I wanted to go to the CC camp. I told him my mother had died, and that I just wanted to go to camp to get away from it all. So he said, "Miss House," he said, "Sign him up." She said, "No, he's not old enough." So Tommy told her to give him the papers and he would sign me up. He said, "Miss House," he said, "If he's underage," he says, "All we have to do is let him go into camp now, and then in August if he wants to come home to go back to school," he said, "all he would have to do was write us a letter and let us know, and we would write a letter up there and have him to come back to school if he wants to." She would not sign me up, so Tommy said, "Give me the papers," and says, "I'll sign him up." So Tommy took the papers and sit down with me and filled them out. I went home and thought that that was the end of it. About two days later, early one morning, someone knocked on the door and I went to the door. There stood Miss House, she said, "Albert, do you still want to go to camp?" I said, "Yes." She told me to take some papers she had and go to Norfolk, the next day to the post office building and go into the basement and give the papers to the people there.

The next day I got up early and got dressed and went down to catch the streetcar to go to the boat harbor in Newport News. A ten cent ride. I got off and got on the ferry at the boat harbor in Newport News and went to Little Creek dock in Norfolk. There I took the streetcar to the post office building. I went into the basement and met the other boys who were going to camp. We were examined and all got ready to go to a restaurant to get something to eat. This was about 2:30 p.m.

We went to the restaurant and had a meal. When we got ready to leave, they handed us a brown bag with two baloney sandwiches. It was two pieces of bread and a piece of baloney in between it. And they gave us an apple to go with it. Then we went to a train station. We got on a train in Norfolk and rode all night long and arrived in Roanoke the next morning about four or five o'clock. The ride was terrible. In those days, the coal-fired burner made the steam, and cinders would come into the coach although it was closed in with windows. Cinders turn your face black and got in your eyes. We stayed in Roanoke about an hour and a half. Another train hooked on us and pulled us up to Luray, Virginia.

In Luray there was a CCC truck to pick us up and take us to camp. There must have been about fifteen boys. We took 211 up to the Skyline Drive and then we went to Camp 10 and let off boys and on to Camp 1 to let off other boys. Then to Camp 2 where I got off, at Big Meadows on the Skyline Drive. Camp 2, SNP 350, Camp Fechner. Two others got off with me. Grover West was one and the other one I do not remember his name. We went to the rec room where we were told what we were to expect to do or not to do while we were in camp. After they got through and the lieutenant looked at me and said, "Boy, how old are you?" I said, "Eighteen years old." And he said, "Now, look, you're in the CC camp and nobody is going to put you out. And I would like to know how old you are." I said, "Eighteen years old." And he said, "Okay, you're eighteen years old." The last day I was in camp he was in his office and he said, "How old are you?" He said, "I've been wanting to know how old you are ever since you came into camp." He said, "I bet you're only eighteen now." I said, "Would you believe sixteen?" He said, "I thought you were young when you came in camp, but I didn't think you were that young!"

When you came into camp, you had to do K.P. duty for about two weeks. Grover West and I was doing K.P. at the same time. We were assigned to the officer's mess. We were assigned to set up and clean the tables and serve the officers their food and clean and wash the dishes after them. Grover said, "Look, I can not wait on people. So if you would wait on them, I'll do the cleaning up

after I waited on them." When they had finished eating, they had used three plates for food, dessert and vegetables. So Grover looked at me and he talked through his nose and he said, "Them people done messed up nine plates, and there was only three." [people] I guess he was used to eating everything from one plate. "Now, I have a lot of cups and saucers and dishes to wash." And I told him, "A deal's a deal. You would not wait on them, so you'll have to clean up the table and wash the dishes."

We were in the kitchen, sitting and drinking coffee one day after we had finished the breakfast and was getting ready--waiting for the boys to come in to have their breakfast. It must have been six or eight of us. The cook was an old man, in his sixties, I believe, when he looked at us and said, "I have a hell of a hurtin' in my arm." He rubbed his arm and passed out on the table. People were working on him and one went to get the doctor. When the doctor came in, he looked at him and checked him over and said he was dead. We had a funeral for him in the national cemetery in Culpeper, Virginia. When you were in camp, the government would pay to bury you, if you were in the CCC's. We all got ready and went to the funeral, down in Culpeper. On the way back, we stopped in a little town called Syria, where they sold "white lightening" and we got ours. Moonshine. And went back to camp by way of Criglersville Road, the one that passes past Camp Hoover.

When you were ready to go to work out in the fields, you got up about 6:30, and we--they would blow reveille, in the morning. You dressed in your dress clothes and then some of you had khaki pants and shirt. You pressed two creases in the front of the shirt, and three in the back. You wore a flat necktie, it was black and about 1½ wide. You had to look neat to go to the mess hall. You would tuck the tie in your shirt. In the winter you wore a wool shirt and pants in the same manner. When I was first went into camp, we did not have a mess hall. They cooked outdoors under a wooden canopy. And there was other canopies that you ate under. You ate off of your mess kits and spoon, forks and knives were large. When you went home after you ate with them, you thought you could not hold the little spoons and forks that you had at your home. After you finish eatin', you would

wash your mess kit. They had three barrels, of metal, that one man would start a fire under, and have the water hot. That was his job, three times a day. You would first put them in the first barrel, which they said had something in it to sterilize them. Then you would put them in another that had soapy water. And you would shake them around. You would rinse the utensils in the third and last barrel in clear water. Later, we had a mess hall. In the morning you would get up and get outside for flag raising. You would line up, two wide, in front of your barracks to be checked in. You would go to the mess hall dressed in your dress clothes. You would not go into the mess hall with your work clothes on.

After eating breakfast, which consisted some days of eggs, sausage, fried apples, salt fish which we called salty dogs, and boiled eggs, pancakes, and meals were not bad. You would go back to the barracks and change into your work clothes with a hat, pants, and shirt made of denim. You would get on your truck that would take you to your work place, about twenty- five boys to a truck. The truck driver was to keep his truck clean. During the day, he would drive the truck in a stream and wash it. Some days he would clean the motor, taking it apart, cleaning them in kerosine and replacing them; starters, generators, and other parts.

We would do our jobs and about 12:00 we would eat dinner, then go back and work, and work until about 3:30 and then we'd get ready to go back to camp. We would get ready to eat; you would have to get ready: take a bath, change into dress clothes and get ready to line up for chow. We had very good meals. Chicken, home vegetables, pork, biscuits and fish. They had a man from Gloucester to bring fresh seafood -- fish, oysters, clams -- once a week. Sometimes I would ride home with him. I had a day off. I think we came on Thursday night and that would give me 'til Monday to get back. The man that was the manager of the rec room -- his name was Jenkins -- knew him, and I talked him into introducing me to him. After we ate, we stood at attention outside while they lowered the flag. After that, we were on our own until 9:30 or 10:00 when they blew retreat. At that time, all lights were out and that's when we went to bed.

The first I remember doing when I went out on the road to work was building Franklin's Cliff [Franklin Cliffs] Overlook. We did not have tractors or equipment to use in camp. All we had were cross cut saws, picks, mattocks, axes, and shovels, bush axes and tools of that type. Wheelbarrows, the kind with the steel wheel, we did not have rubber tires on them in these days. First we cut down the trees with our axes, then saws, and then we would drag them back into the woods out of sight. We made a rock curbing around near the edge. I am not sure whether this is the same curbing there today as the one that we installed there. Then we would level the dirt and have our trucks--they were small dump trucks, about a ton and a half dump, a 1933 Chevrolet, and dump the gravel on the ground. We would take the gravel and level it off with our rakes, shovels and wheelbarrows until we had a flat, smooth place for the cars to park on. Chief Cave, as we called him, he was our leader. He lived on Route 611 at the foot of the mountain in a large brick house which is still standing with a family living in it today. We would go to Chief Cave on Saturdays and help him plant potatoes, corn, and vegetables on a piece of land near camp. If you left camp and went south past Tanner's Ridge Fire Road, you would come to a road on the left. We called it fire roads in those days. They were only more or less like a path. We would help him plant in the spring and harvest in the fall. He had a 1929 Model A Ford two door. We would take the rear seat out and fill it full of potatoes. Chief Cave was a caring man, likeable, rosy puffed cheeks and roly-poly belly. He would make a good Santa Claus. We all liked him. One day while we were working on Franklin Cliffs, a man stopped by with a large camera on a tripod, about twenty-four by twenty-four inches and said he'd like to take a picture of us on the rock with the valley and Luray in the background. Chief Cave was in the middle and we were all around him. He took the picture of us and said he was going to try to sell it to a background for a movie. He told us to look for it, but I have never seen it in any movie yet.

After I was in camp a while, I went out exploring one day after work. I walked behind the camp to the cliffs and looked at Dark Hollow and Spitler's Hill. I walked over to the left and came to a place where our water from camp came up the hill on about a 60° incline. They had water pipes

and a wood box about eighteen inches wide, and filled with sawdust to keep it from freezing. At that time, the road coming down, Skyline Drive, made a 90° turn right behind our camp. It went straight instead of making an angle across the hill as it does now. And then it would go down to where the parking lot is to go to Dark Hollow Falls and make another 90° turn. We had a spring down the hill where we got our water from and had our water pumps to pump up to camp. They have started a new road now that comes from the Byrd Center and goes down to where the parking lot is where you go down to Dark Hollow. The old road that made the turn before has now been all grown over and has returned back to trees.

What I'm going to tell you now is something I don't really remember and was told to me by the different members in camp what had happened. I must have stepped on this box and, being on an angle, it must have threw me. And I rolled down that box into the middle of the road. I was knocked unconscious and I was laying in the middle of the road when a motorist came by and saw me and picked me up and carried me back into camp. He let me off in camp and the boys was having a good time talking and joking with me, thinking I was drunk. My face was bruised, skinned, and I knew that I was in the CC camp, but that was all I knew. I did not even know my name. Finally, Grover West came over and said that he knew me, and that he knew I was not drunk, so they took me to the infirmary and the doctor came and looked at me and he put me to bed. About 9:30 I had to use the bathroom, so the doctor took me to the bathroom. We had to go through the washhouse to get to the bathroom and there was a boy there, washing a pair of seersucker pants the same as the ones that I wore in the camp. So I tried to take them away from him. The doctor told him that I had been hurt, and didn't know what I was doing, and that for him to tell me that he was washing the pants for me. So that's what he told me, and that satisfied me. So we went back to the infirmary and I laid in the bed until about 3:30 in the morning and I came to and looked up and I saw the rafters above me and wondered where I was. At that time the doctor, he had sat there on the bed next to me, waiting for me to come to, spoke to me and asked if I knew where I was. I said, "Yeah, I'm in the CC camp." He

asked if I knew my name and I said, "Yes, I'm Albert Willett." They kept me in the infirmary about four days. They questioned me if anybody had beat me and just like I told them, I don't remember anybody beating me, but I believe what I did was fell down on that box, and rolled down in the street. They wondered if somebody had pushed me and I said, "No, I don't know of anybody that pushed me," that I was standing there and the next thing I knew, I stepped on the box and the next I knew was when I woke up at 3:30 in the morning in the infirmary. I still don't remember anything about what happened at this period of time.

When you first went into camp, the first impression they had of you is what your nickname was. I had white hair, so they called me "Whitey". Other names was "She"; "She" had wavy hair, blond, and looked like a woman. There was another one that had wavy hair that looked like he had a permanent, and he looked something like a girl, so they called him "Mae West". At that time, Mae West had a movie coming out called *Going to Town* and Mae West was the star. They had signs everywhere telling all about the movie, including banners on the side of streetcars, as long as a streetcar. One was called "Rats"; he was a Shifflett, from Shifflett's Hollow, which is not far from the Drive. There was "Sailor", he was in the Navy; "Brassmouth", he had a lot of gold teeth; the doctor was Waschoski or something like that and they called him "Tiddy War Horse". We did not let him know we called him that. Commanding officer was bald, so they called him "Marble Top", but not to his face. "Flappy", he had large ears. "Rich Creek", he was from Rich Creek, his name was Emmett Ballett. "Stoney Creek", he was from Stoney Creek, Virginia. "Dog Man", he was always talking about his beagle hounds. His real name was Toler. I was in the CC camp with him when I went to the CC Camp F-21 Company 1368 in New Castle, Virginia. He came there with me, also. When we came to the New Castle camp, he told me that he had married. I asked him who he had married and he said, "Dixie Belle Hoover." I said, "The one that lives in Harrisonburg?" and he said yes, she was the one that he married. She was one of the girls that came to camp on payday to have sex with the boys. "Uncle Dave", named after Uncle Dave Macon, who played hillbilly music from a radio station

in Wheeling, West Virginia, that we'd be playing when we woke up in the morning at 6:00. "Skillet Licker" -- they tried bringing in hot lunches for us at mealtime and they would bring the lunch in the fields and we would take our mess kits and they would put on the food on them. One day I ate all my food and Big Jim Trainam, the one they called "She", looked at my plate and said, "You have ate all your food; you are a skillet licker!" For a while in camp, they called me "Skillet Licker".

They found out that the gooseberry plants have something to do with the white pine blister rust that was killing the chestnut [pine] trees. So we were told to go out and pull all the gooseberries up and hang them up in trees with their roots up in the air to dry. We would come back in about 90 days and put them in piles and burn them. We started on Hawksbill Mountain. We would start at the road and line up about 25 boys wide and about six foot spaces apart, with the last one with a string and worked to the top, pulling the gooseberries and hanging up in the trees. So we would cover the whole mountain like this. The next place we did was Spitler's Hill. At that time, most of it was pasture land with old rail fences. Every once in a while we'd have a rattlesnake on the bush, so we'd have to kill the snake to pull the bush. I skinned one of them and made a belt. I took a pair of pliers and pulled his fangs, then I cut around his head and pulled the skin to the rattlers and cut the meat out. I used alum to cure the hide. I put a slit at the head and at the tail and slipped it over a belt. The head would hang one way and the rattlers another. We killed nineteen rattlers one month. While working at Spitler's Hill, we got our water from a spring that was at a house on Spitler's Hill. There was two springs, we called the upper and the lower springs. A cow had shit in the spring and it had run under the ground to the lower spring, so I went back; I asked Chief Cave where I could go to get some water and he told me to go to the lower spring. So I told him the lower spring had the same thing in it that the upper spring had, the water looked brown, like tea. And they said, "No," said, "The water in the lower spring is not the one that comes out of the upper spring." So they wanted me to go get the water, anyway. I went back and got them the water and carried it up there and dumped it in their mess kits and they started to drink it. And when they did, they started spitting left and right. So I asked

Chief Cave, I said, "Do you know of another spring?" And he says, "No. Says, "Go back to the upper spring, clean the spring out, let the water run until it's free and clear, and then fill us some water." So that's what I had to do. It took about an hour and a half to two hours to do this and by the time I got ready and brought the boys their water, they were wanting water awful bad.

A family lived in the house on Spitler's Hill and I remember that they had a 1915 Model T touring car they used but never got a license for it. They had a thirteen-year-old boy who was working out in the fields, raising corn and vegetables. He worked with his shirt off one day and he had the worst sunburn I've ever seen. His back was just one big scab. So we talked him into going to see our doctor in the CC camp. The doctor took care of it for him and gave him salve to put on it.

While working on Spitler's Hill, they tried bringing out hot lunches for us during the working days at 12:00. This didn't work very good, so it wasn't long before they went back to the bag lunches. We were eating lunch one day on Spitler's Hill, down near where the dynamite shed was, and they had all talked about how David and Goliath and how David killed Goliath with a slingshot. So we were talking about how far we could throw a rock with a slingshot. I had made one just like it with three foot long thongs and a leather pocket to put the rock in. After we had ate lunch we was out there and we was getting ready to see how far we could throw a rock with this sling. I put a rock into it, about an inch and a half to two inches, in the leather pocket, with the two leather thongs like it was supposed to be. I spun it around my head about three times and let it fly. Emmett Ballard and the other boys were standing about 50 feet from me, near a pine tree. The rock somehow got tied up in the pocket and I spun it around and let it go. When it did, it hit a pine tree about two inches above Emmett Ballard's head. It knocked the bark off, and Emmett said, "Whitey," he said, "Let me see that thing." And when he did, he come over and took it from me and cut it in about two inch pieces and said he did not want to hear about David and Goliath again. We were lucky; two inches lower and it would have hit him in the forehead and possibly killed him.

There was another boy in camp, I don't remember his name. To be on Saturdays, he would

take us into Harrisonburg, to a bawdy house. When we were there, we would hear him call to people "Mom" and "Sis". We did not think anything about it, thinking it was just a name that they called them. One day a boy came into camp we called Flappy because he had large ears. We told him about the house and said we would take him there on Saturday. So he told us, he said, "Well, I swear this boy lived, that was in camp with us." Flappy lived in Harrisonburg. So we told him on Saturday we'd like to go in with him and let him show us where the house was to make sure we were talking about the same place. Saturday we took us to the house and it was the same one. He said, "That girl was his sister and the woman was his mother." The next day when we came back into camp, they took everything he had, including his barrack--his bunk and radio, and threw it out the window. When he came back, he wanted to know what happened, so we told him we did not want him in the barracks. So he went to get the Lieutenant. The Lieutenant came, he told him what had happened, and he left with the boy and that was the last we ever saw of him. There was twelve boys in camp telling the Lieutenant that if he stayed in that same barrack, they didn't want to stay in that barrack.

Flappy went home one day. When he came back, and nobody could get along with him. He kept picking on us 'til I finally let him--hit him in the face with my fist and the boys stopped us and went to get the boxing gloves and said if we fought, we would have to fight according to the rules with the gloves on. When the boys came back, they had the lieutenant with them. That's when I knew I had to win the fight. We boxed a while and finally he got a--I got a solid in his chest and the blood flew from his nose and mouth. The Lieutenant stopped us fighting. I was scared to death; they took him to the infirmary. After a while he came back and stopped bleeding. We sat down on the bunk and he was talking and apologizing to me about what he had done. So I asked him what was bothering him -- we knew something was bothering him, everybody in the barrack, since he came back to camp. And he said while he was at home, his father had married his girlfriend. When he came in the CC camp, he had left his girlfriend at his daddy's house to live with him until he could come home to marry her.

We got paid at the end of the month and the camp would have people coming to the rec room to put on plays and do tricks that the people like that did for a living in those days. They worked for the government and they would do all kinds of tricks and that is the first time I saw a person ride a unicycle. He would come up about an inch from the end of the stage and turn around and go back. He was good. Some weeks we would have silent motion pictures when we first went into camp. One of the boys said he could get up close to the screen and he could hear what they were saying. Later we got the talkies. You had to put the picture on the screen and it had a record what did the talking for you. You had to slow it down and step it up with your fingers or it would get out of tune with the pictures and the talking wouldn't be the same as the pictures. We would have dances at some weekends and they would go to Harrisonburg, Stanleytown, and Luray and bring girls to the dance with them for the boys. Sometimes we would have a band to dance by. We had a man from somewhere in the valley on payday to bring a trailer to the camp with two girls for the boys to have sex. He parked behind the stockade fence until a lieutenant ran him off. The next month he parked up in the woods where Byrd Center is at this time. And the rangers run him off. He went to Camp Number 1 or 10 and that's where the sheriff came and locked him up.

To tell you how we had a little entertainment in the camp, we were out on the road one day and a man came by in a '33 Chevrolet and asked us where the road went. So I looked at him and I told him, I said, "Look," I says, "I've been here two years," and I said, "The road hasn't been anywhere yet." Before I could tell him I was just joking, he took off and went down the road and let out a stream of cussin' like a sailor. He had been running that road for a long time and couldn't find any way to get off, so I guess it did upset him.

Another thing we did while working in camp was to slope the banks on the side of the road. They had a steam shovel, a real steam engine. The engine was mounted on the back and it had a boiler about eight foot high that they would start about 5:30 in the morning to get up a head of steam before they would start to work. This machine looked like it was hand made. It was crude, with a

sheet metal roof. And instead of having hydraulics, it was all cables, with big drums that went around to pull the machinery up and down. They were about three foot in diameter. I was told it was made in about 1916 for the War Department. It was chain drive. We had a lot of large, five ton trucks that had solid tires and chain drive--

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START SIDE

They had chain drives, too. They had a sign on the front of them, "FWD" and we were told that was meant for four wheel drive. But this could not be true because they were run by chain drive and the only two rear wheels had the chains to them. Another thing we were told that they stood for Federal War Department, which makes sense. They said it was made for the Federal War Department during the war in 1916, the World War I. It looked like all the heavy machinery that we got was what was left over from World War I. We would dump dirt near the road where the bank was and take wheelbarrows and shovels, rakes and mattocks, and level the dirt off. We would level it off so it would be smooth for to put the sod on top of it. We would put about two inches of dirt over rock. Then we would go down in the meadow, that is grown up now and has trees onto it. It was near Tanner's Ridge Road, near the cemetery that now stands. We would take an ax and chop the sod in two foot wide by six foot long strips and roll it in a ball. After we had a truck load, we would take the balls and six men, three on each end, would get hold of a steel rod and then the seventh man would roll the ball of sod onto the rod and we would pick it up and load it in the truck. The place we cut the sod was down near Tanner's Ridge where the cemetery now stands. The trucks were small, low trucks. They were one and a half ton, 1933 Chevrolets, dump trucks. We would take them to the place where we would use them. We would place them on the banks side by side, until it was all covered. Then we would put pegs in them to hold them to the--in place until they would grow the

roots together and it'd be one sod. We would mix in dirt where possible and in cracks when we had to. We were covering a large bank near Fisher's Gap. It was about one mile south of Fisher's Gap going up towards Camp 3. It was about one mile up on the right. We were fixing that bank, it had a large rock on the top of the bank and as we were working, a large bobcat came out of the woods and stood on that rock and screamed at us. Someone said it must have a den nearby; a bobcat would not come that close to you.

After being in camp for a while, I started to go with a girl in Dark Hollow. She lived in a log cabin with a dirt floor and an open fire place. It was one room and a loft. I think there were about three children and a man and his wife. We had gone together about six weeks when one day I went to church at night on Sunday and as the preacher was preaching, a Mr. Cave, [Gordon A. Cave] I think his name was, two boys near the window was flashing a nickel-plated revolver. Looked like they was going to shoot into the church. Two burly mountaineers got up and went on the outside. Mr. Cave, the preacher, did not miss a word, he kept right on preaching. I was near the window and could hear what they said. They said, "Look, this is the house of the Lord and you do not do anything like this on this ground. If you have a quarrel with someone in the church, wait until they get of the church and go--and get off of these grounds before you do anything about it." They seemed like they were religious people. They left and the two men came back into church and set down, without saying a word. That night as I walked the girl home, she lived near Fisher's Gap, about two thirds the way up the road to Fisher's Gap. So when I left with her, I walked the road back to camp about three times as far, instead of going up the hill. I didn't want any part of those two boys with their pistol.

The next week we found out what it was all about. There was a boy in camp going with a girl named Beulah. She lived on the curve in the house across from the preacher's house on the way to Fisher's Gap. The boy would do anything to make a nickel or a dime and save every penny that he made. He'd press your shirt, sew on buttons or patches, or fix tears and anything like that. He had gotten Beulah pregnant. Two men came into camp, they were real hillbillies. Tall, skinny, and

pointed hats. They each had a rifle and I believe the rifle at that time looked to me that the rifle was as long as they were tall. They went to the Lieutenant's office. We went out to work and when we came in from work, we found that they'd wanted this boy to make . . . him marry Beulah. He talked them out of it and promised to marry her if they would let him go home and get the money he had saved out of the bank. So they let him go home. When he went home, he married his girlfriend that he went to school with in that town. That was the last time I went into Dark Hollow.

They had a large box in Dark Hollow that evidently was used for a community ice box. It was about two feet wide, eighteen inches deep, and about twelve foot long. It was down near the creek where it runs under the road, coming down from Dark Hollow Falls. It was on the side of the road near the creek. There must have been two or three families using it, as it had meats, eggs, butter, milk, and other things in it, and jars, and was sealed at the top with a lid so the water could flow down each side of it and out the other end to keep them cool. They would fry meats and sausages and put them in the jars and turn them upside down and let the grease seal them. They said they could keep the meat for a few months like this.

They had glider meets on the Big Meadows each year. In 1935 they were going to meet on a Sunday. Friday, one of the men's wife called and said that she would like to talk to her husband and we looked for him and he was not with the other men. So they asked us to take the truck and go and look for him, maybe he was broke down on the road. We drove out past Hawksbill Mountain and saw some loose stones in the wall. We looked over the bank and saw his car upside down and the trailer behind it upright. We went down to the car and he was under it. He was not hurt except for where the acid from the battery had run out and hit him on his leg. He could not move his leg. He had laid there from Wednesday to Friday. We picked the car up off of him and the only thing wrong with him was a place where his leg was sore. We got the car out and then the trailer out on the road and pulled it back to camp. The trailer and the glider was not damaged. We took him to the infirmary and had the doctor patch up his leg. He had to make seven flights on Saturday to be in the meet

Sunday. The others had already made theirs. He looked at the car and said if he could cut the top off and put some oil and water in, he could use it to pull up his glider. So the man in the camp took a torch and cut the top off and they made a convertible out of it. We pulled him up six times and he would fly around and circle back and land. We would hook the glider to the rope and then hook it to the back of the car, and then one man would get on each wing and run along the side until he'd get enough air under the wings so he could control the glider. Then they'd turn him loose and they would pull the glider down the road about 25 miles, 27 miles an hour and it would go up in the air. And then at about 35 miles an hour he'd be almost straight up behind you in the air and he'd cut himself loose. And then he would circle around and come back and land. When he was ready to make his seventh trip, the fog started to roll in. So when the fog started getting thick, we told him he shouldn't go up this time. But he said no, he was going to make it anyway. The wind had an uplift that would lift the gliders up in the air over behind where Big Meadows Campground is at this time. So he said instead of going over there, he would just circle around in the air and come back down. He told us to go ahead and take the car, pull him up, and then circle back and get on the side of the road where he would land, and for all of us to scream. These gliders didn't have motors and they just--you could hear just about everything that was said or done, where there wasn't anything but except the wind blowing by. So we pulled him up in the air, and cut him loose and went back and got on the side of the road and started to scream. As we were screaming, we finally saw him come under the clouds of fog and started to land. Well, there was only one tree in that meadow and that was the tree that he hit. He had heard us screaming and he knew exactly where he was going to land at, but it just happened that this one tree was in his way. When it hit the tree, it tore the glider all to pieces, but he was not hurt. So we went over and asked him if we could take a piece of the glider for a souvenir and he told us not to take it until he looked it over and he would look it over first, so he looked it all over and after he got through he said, "Well, there's nothing I can salvage out of it, so you just as well go ahead and take it." I had cut the number off the tail, out the back of the glider and had kept it for many years.

Somehow I've misplaced it. The boys tore so much of the fabric off and broke pieces off, all it left was the frame. I went back to look for it again in about 1960 to see if it was still there. There was a piece of the skid still there at the time. It was rotten. The ski was the place that took the . . . place of a wheel. Lot of them didn't have wheels on their gliders, they had skids.

Sometimes the gliders would miss the lift as we pulled them up on a meet and they would miss the lift, so they would have to go down in the valley and find a place to land. They would fly around in the valley, 'til they found a pasture land that was large enough for them to land on. Then once they'd land down in there, they would have to phone us and they would have to bring the trailers and the cars down to pick them up and bring them back to camp.

There was a boy in the camp named Rats, the one we called Rats, his name was Shifflett.

[break in recording; recording begins in mid-sentence]

. . . boy in the camp named Rats, the one that lived there in Shifflett's Hollow, his name was Shifflett. He had a 1928 Model A Ford that had the clincher-type tires on it. It was the only car that I know of made with this type of tire. And to take one off was a job; it took an hour and a half to two and a half hours and there was a lot of cussing going on when you changed these tires. And the cars after that had what they called a drop center wheel. When people changed these tires, there was a lot of cussing going on. It took at least an hour and a half to two and a half hours to change one. You had to put the tire on the rim and put about eight or ten pounds of pressure into it and then bounce the tire up and down until these grooves would slid into the groove on the rim. We took the tire and started back towards where his car was parked. We had to go down past Tanner's Ridge way. Just before you get to Tanner's Ridge Road, there was a big open meadow at that time. It's all grown up now, and trees. Down below the meadow, about 500 to 600 yards, there was a wood land place, with trees into it. It was about a ten foot drop from the road down to the meadow. It was sloped, you know, for the road to hold up. So I just wondered what would happen if I turned that tire loose and let it roll down that

hill. So I turned the tire loose and it rolled down that hill and it went down across that meadow. The last time we saw the tire, it was going down into the wood land. Every time it hit a rock, it would bounce up above the trees. Rats looked at me and said, "Whitey," he said, "You turned that tire loose on purpose." I said, "No, Rats," I said, "It slipped out of my hand." So we had to go back to camp, get the other tire, fix that, and bring it back to get the car.

To show you how we had fun in camp, one of the boys told Rats that he saw that wheel down in Stanleytown. He said he was standing in Stanleytown, near a stop sign. He said the wheel had rolled all the way down to Stanleytown and said if it hadn't stopped for a stop sign, he said it would have rolled on into Luray. In that day, didn't have red lights, they had stop signs. We all had a good laugh from that! Everybody did these things in camp all in good nature and we would not get mad.

We had things for recreation. We played football, baseball, basketball, ice skating, skiing, and everything that was games. I remembered our pitcher, who's first name was Dewey. He would have us massage his arm with alcohol before and after the game. Our lieutenant went to college and for our football game he made up a little chant that went:

[to the tune of the *Notre Dame Fight Song*]

On for Fechner, on for Fechner,

Fight on for your fame.

Fight, members, fight, fight, fight

We will win this game!

In 1936, President Roosevelt came to our camp to dedicate the Skyline Drive. About a month before he came, they told us to go out to Big Meadows. There was, I think it was two planes that was going to land and one of us would take steel pegs and drive them in the ground and tie them down. The planes in those days was real light and it wouldn't take much of a wind to turn them over, and we had right much wind up on Big Meadows. They were Navy trainers, two planes, bi-wings, the sailor landed it--we had to stake the plane down and tie it with ropes. They had places where we could tie

them down and had two places on the tail of it where we could pick the tail up and roll it around. We staked them out in the fields for that night and then later on we went out to build a metal shed to store them in. Built the shed across the street on the ground where the President was coming. The sailors came to our camp and stayed with us. They would play in our games and eat and talk with us, play cards with us on rainy days -- we would not figure out what they were doing there. Roosevelt came on Sunday. We had a stage built for him on the outside and had put logs for people to sit on to make a semi-circle, like you would put into a coliseum for people to sit on. It was just about in front of where the Byrd Center is now, across the road. () coming to camp didn't mean anything to me at that time, so I went home on that weekend. I wished I had stayed for the occasion so I could remember it, but let's go on now.

After the President left, the next day they asked us to go out and take the plane and pull it back out on Big Meadows so they could take off. We asked them what they were doing in camp and he told one of the boys that what they were was Secret Service agents that had been sent there to check the camp out before the President came there on Sunday. So we rolled the plane back over across the road to the other meadow and then they took off from there.

There was two families living behind our camp. There was a thirteen year old boy who lived at one and I had played with a lot. I had two days off, so I went to the house and borrowed a 22 rifle and his dog to go hunting. I was hunting behind camp on the hill that goes down to Dark Hollow. There was on a cliff . . . when I was on this cliff, I heard the dog barking and carrying on and I looked over the cliff and he was having a big fight with a ground hog. It looked like the ground hog was having the best of the fight. So I took the rifle and shot at the ground hog. At the time I shot, the dog jumped just as I fired. I thought I had hit him, but I hit the ground hog. It was in his--back of his head, and it knocked his eye put. It was hanging on his cheek. They were still fighting strong. Finally, the dog moved away enough that I got the ground hog and killed it. I took it to the boy's home and they were glad to get it. He told me to come by Sunday and he would have ground hog for dinner. I

said I would, but I skipped that meal. I was not eating any ground hog. The dog was a collie dog, it was a good hunting dog. He would hunt almost anything, but they said that he was the best coon dog around in the mountains.

We would play cards on the weekends and at nights and on rainy days. We did not have a lot of money, so when we would start playing with a 1¢ box of wooden matches. We would play until we had all the matches. One boy would probably have them all. Then they would let us buy in the game for 1¢ on a box of matches. Finally we would have pennies, nickels and dimes in the game which we called "white money". There was a boy that played all day long and had all of the money in the barrack. He would now have the grand total of 65 or 75 cent. It happened a lot of time.

We got a grand total of \$30 a month. Five was for you, the other twenty-five was sent home. The assistant leaders got \$36; he would keep eleven. The leaders got \$45; he would keep twenty and the balance of the money, the \$25 would be sent home to the families at home. We did not need much, all the things we needed were supplied: food, clothing, medical and housing. All we needed money for was enjoyment, movies in town, or candy, toothpaste. I used Pepsodent tooth powder, started using it in camp and continued using for about forty years.

We had one boy who had been in camp about two weeks named Beach and had not taken a bath. So they took him to a wash house and locked him in a shower. Then they had about a five foot side around the three sides and the other was a wall. They took a G.I. brush and nailed it to a stick, and stood on a bench so they could scrub him from the outside. They scrubbed him with G.I. soap, it was made like Octagon soap, to get him clean. They did not have to tell him to take a bath again.

One weekend I went home and came back on Sunday. I was hitchhiking. I was in Stanardsville when a man in a '29 Model A Ford picked me up. I saw it was a family that had a son that was in our camp and I had spent some weekends at their house. When we started going up the mountain, the fog started to roll in. It got thicker and thicker. One of the boys had to lay on the running board of the car. In those days the cars had running boards, and he had to lay down there and

put his arm up in the air and wave right and left so his dad would know how to go, to see how to get back to where they were going. You could only see about to the front of the hood of the car. [break in tape, restarts with Willett repeating last sentence] You could see only to the front of the car. When they got to the place at Booten's Gap where they lived, he asked me if I wanted him to take me into camp. [break in tape, restarts in mid-sentence] ". . . leave you out here like this." Said, "If anything would happen to you," says, "I would feel terrible." These people seemed like they always wanted to help people and do for them. So I wasn't going to tell him twice not to take me into camp. So he took me all the way into camp and let me off.

That night and the next day it snowed bad. Snow was everywhere, drifts on the road, ten to twelve foot high. Between the hills, they were about twenty foot deep. We were snow-bound for about one week. The rocks on the side of the road where water trickled down now was frozen four to six inches thick. It was beautiful. They sent out west and got a snowplow. He got that one that grinds the snow up in the front and then blow it out in the field about thirty or forty feet. It was beautiful to see it work. Sometimes we'd go out in the snow bank as far as you could, and then back out to let the snow fall because it was higher than the snowplow. Our phones was out, all the lines up there--it had started sleeting that night, too--was formed with ice about an inch around the walls and they were sagging down in some places and broke in other places. Our phone was out, so we had to start at the camp and follow it to repair it. We started behind camp and followed the line and got it out and cleared it. We would go a little ways and clear it out and patch it up, hook it back together, and then we would test to see if it worked. We had to go in behind camp and then across the meadow where the glider field was. We had to go under the road in one place. We followed it all the way across the road, up the hill, to Tanner's Ridge Road and then made a right hand turn and went down into Stanleytown until we get to Stanleytown, patching it as we went. Some places we wouldn't have insulators to put on the poles, so we'd drive a nail in the tree, put a Coca-Cola bottle on it, and tie it with a--Coca-Cola bottle--with a wire. We would patch it up this way, and then when the ice and

snow got off the ground, we'd come back and redo it again and put it back like it was at first. We got extra time off when we went out and did a job of this type.

With the snow on the ground, the Lieutenant went into Harrisonburg and bought six pairs of shoes and ice skates for us. We made a ski run from the old road at Byrd Center down to the road near where another meadow was at the spring house for our camp. We made a jump at the road about five foot length and they would jump the road and then ride on down the trail in the other meadow down where the spring house was. We had rocks in the trail, and when we got to a rock, we would lift that foot and slide on the other one. Sometimes it was right and sometimes it was your left. Two boys stopped in a new car that was from the University of Virginia in Charlottesville and they asked if they could use our ski trail. We said sure. They had the kind of skis that fit on a pair of shoes, lock tight, and we had beginner's. Just had a leather strap across it that you slipped your shoe in and if you would fall over, the ski would come off. These boys had theirs locked to the feet. So they went down, and as they was going down, they hit one of these rocks. They flew up in the air and they come down, they was all tied up in their skis. Skis sticking up in the air and one foot this way and one foot the other, and they couldn't get up. When we first went down from the road, there was about a ten foot drop that gave you the speed to go out across the field that was sloped not that bad, it was just a slope in the field that you'd slid on. We ran down to where they were and got the skis off of them and got them ready so they could walk back up to the top of the road. Then we asked them if they would want to use it again, and they said, "No," they wasn't interested. They loaded up their skis in the car and then went on down the road. Seeing there was no one hurt in the deal, we all had a big laugh.

One day we were skiing and a reporter came by and asked if he could take our picture. There were six of us. It was me, Emmett Ballard, Jim Trainam, and the other three I do not remember their names. He said he was going to put it in the paper. That week we got the paper and our pictures was on the paper. I've tried to find out which paper it was, and I haven't been able to find out. I've been in the archives of the Charlottesville paper, and the Luray paper but have not found it. It must be in

some paper I'm not . . . know about. It might be in the Harrisonburg paper. I will try, if I get there and have the chance.

There was a boy in the camp with us by the name of Breeden that lived in Booten's Gap that had a brother. He was about thirteen years old and the same family that picked me up and carried me to camp when it was snowing. So he asked me to go home one weekend. His dad and another man and his brother came to pick us up. It was the same Model T car. We went off the Drive at Booten's Gap and made a left hand turn, going towards Hoover's camp. When we got to a stream, it was flooded and we had to ford the stream. We got in the middle of the stream and the motor died. The man told the little boy to shove the car out. I said I would get out and help him. He said, "No." Said, "You're company," and says, "Company does not do things like this." So I set in the car and they all took a shot of whiskey from a gallon vinegar jug, and passed it around, so I had to take a drink. It set your mouth on fire, but you had to say how good it was because it was probably special made by Harvey Nichols, who had a still in the vicinity. He was supposed to make the best white lightening. The little boy got out and pushed the car out. I was wondering if he could push it out. They put the car in low gear and used the starter to pull it out with him. When we got to the other side, we had to wait for the motor to dry. They passed the jug around again. Finally, the car started. It was a vinegar jug with a ring on the top. You would put your thumb through the ring, and lay it on your shoulder and take a drink that way. That is the way they drank their whiskey. The little boy could drink as much whiskey as any man, I think.

We went on to their house. It was a nice house for the mountain people, two stories high, weatherboard. It seemed like the people could live on almost nothing. They made all the things that they used: wood bowls, spoons, forks, and tables, chairs, tables, beds. I think the mattress was made of corn shucks. There was a little wagon that caught my eye. It was made of wood. Everything was wood. The lumber was rough. No nails was used. It was put together with wooden pegs. Wooden wheels made from a tree about eight inches round and they were about an inch and a half thick. I tell

you this because it shows that these people were not dumb. They could do anything that they wanted to do. They were religious, but they believed in an eye for an eye and a tooth for a tooth. Some people was killed for going with other men's wives. I'll talk about them.

One Saturday we drove into Stanleytown and went to the theater. One boy with the name of Squires had a car, a '29 Plymouth. We picked up two girls to go with us from Stanleytown. One was named Jenny and the other one was named Marie. Squires had a 1929 Plymouth. We went to the theater. That was just a building and had the projector set on a table and records to play the sound. You'd sit on wooden benches, no backs, and watch the movie. After seeing the movie, we went for a ride in the car. We had white lightening and we all had a good few drinks. We drove up 611 up to the mountain. Just after you passed Chief Cave's house, he was in camp (), there was a right hand turn going up in the mountain and that's where we had a flat tire. We set around with nothing else to do, so all the boys got together and wanted to bet a nickel to see who could pee the furthest. So they each put a nickel on the rocks and backed up against the banks that was about four feet high, and lined up to get ready. The girls saw us and said they wanted to get into it, too. So they took off their pants and pulled up their dress, grabbed their crotch with both hands and squeezed. When we were finished, one of the girls won the money. We left the car and walked into camp.

That Saturday, we decided to come back and get the car. We had fixed the spare tire and went back to get the car. When we went to get the car, the other three tires was gone, so was the battery. The next weekend, we had to wait until Saturday so we could go get the car. When we went to get the car this time, the motor was gone, so we gave up and just took the tires and went back into camp. That car stayed on the side of that road and twenty-five or thirty years later I went by just to see if it was still there. When we went by and looked, the car was all rusted and the only thing that was left to the car was the chassis and the body. The roof was made out of wood and canvas in those days and the roof and the canvas had all rotted off, just leaving the outside frame.

We were playing cards on Squire's bed one day, and they noticed some spots on there. We

pulled the blankets back and saw a lot of stains on them. When Squires come in, we asked about this () by the boys, and he admitted he had a venereal disease. When he left again, they took everything of his and threw it out the window of the barracks. They would not let him in, back in the barrack. Then the lieutenant had him examined by the doctor and he was sent home. He had a venereal disease. You could not stay in camp where we were. We were examined once a month to see if we had a venereal disease. They would come in for inspection unexpectedly, sometimes at night and Tiddy War Horse, as we called him, would come. Somebody would holler out, "Here comes Tiddy War Horse!" Then we would all have to stand up in the barracks next to our bed and what we called it, we had to pull it back and skin it. Squires and the other boy that I talked about was the only two boys that was put out of camp while I was in there the two years.

END SIDE B

END TAPE 1

BEGIN TAPE 2

START SIDE A

One day got the revenuers up in the mountains and they picked one of the men up for making moonshine. Then they got ready and went to court. I do not know his name. Some said it was Harvey Nichols and some said it was other people. But anyway, they had a trial by jury. The lawyer for the man asked him to plead guilty and said he would get him off with a fine and probation if he'd let him do it. He says, "No, I don't want to plead guilty." He says, "I'm going to have the jury try it." They had the trial, and when the jury came back in, they found him not guilty. The lawyer looked at him and said, "You are lucky you didn't get a year in jail and a thousand dollars fine." He says, "How in the world did you know that they wasn't going to convict you?" He said, "Look," he says, "Half of

that jury buys my whiskey and so does the judge." And says, "Why should I plead guilty?" He said, "Where are they going to get their whiskey from if they put me in jail?"

We fought forest fires in camp and there was a number of boys who were on fire duty each week. They would rotate it, so many boys this week, and so many next week. I liked doing this because you were given extra time off fighting fires. They would wake you up in the middle of the night, you would go to the tool shack and pick your tool to fight with. I learned to get a fire rake. That was the least work to do if you had a fire rake. They were made of sickle bar blades. They were triangle-shaped, and you would get--hold them close to the ground; they would cut the brush real easily. Then there were shovels and then there was the indian pump. The indian pump was a hand pump with ten gallons of water. And when you were in camp getting ready to leave, you had to fill that full of ten gallons of water and strap it on your back. And even if you knew that you were going by a stream where you could fill it up, you could not dump the water out. You had to carry the ten gallons of water at all times. So I let someone else take care of that part of the job.

What we would do was try to make a stop somewhere near a stream or a road. We'd take the fire rakes and rake the brush back six or eight feet and set it on fire and make a back fire. The whole time the men there with the indian pumps and the shovels would be there in case the fire jumped. They would take the indian pump and carry it across the road and spray a little spot that had caught on fire and put it out and then the men with the shovels would cover it with dirt. We would make our fire ring, as we called it, on the other side of the road and make a fire to the woods that was left and let it back fire against the fire that was coming to us. The men with the axes would cut up the large trees and trim them so we could burn the brush.

On this night we made a fire stop at the road. We had no sooner got it, we thought, under control when it jumped and got away and went on the other side. So we had to fall back and make another line where there was a stream. We tried to make a fire stop there, but it jumped there, also. We made another fire stop back at another stream. We finally put out the fire. We called this place

Steamy Hollow because it had stills that were in the area. Where we put the fire out, we had got to a rocky place and the trees wasn't as thick as they were down below. And that was the last place we'd had to put it out before it would go all the way to the Skyline Drive. This is the place that we called Steamy Hollow, because of the stills that was in the area. We counted at least seven stills in one area there. There was fifty-seven barrels of mash at this one still and they were in fifty-five gallon wood oak barrels. We all started drinking the mash. You'd have to take your mess kit cup and push the grains away from the top and we'd reach down in the liquid and get your cup full to have a drink. They put yeast or something in the barrels that would cause the mash to roll over like it was boiling and make a funny sound. Stoney Creek went to get his and just about that time the mash started to work and it started to roll over. So he looked at me and said, "What in the world is that?" I said, "Well, there was a coon that fell down in there," and I said, "He's just trying to get out." I says, "But don't let that worry you," I says, "Just go ahead and take you a drink." So he was about half high at that time, so he reached down and filled his cup up and drank him another cup. Then we all laughed and told him what it was. Then we started to walk back out. Some of the boys were new in camp and from big cities and wanted to know how we got out. I told them there was three ways to get out and they said, "How is that?" I said, "Number one, wait at that pine tree over there for a street car, and when a street car come by, get on the street car and go out. Number two, you could call a cab and wait for the cab to take you out." I said, "Number three, we all get together and walk out and that's what I'm going to do." So when we all walked out, they walked out with us.

The revenuing rangers found out about the stills and went in and broke them up the next day. They broke all the mash up, all the barrels, and all the stills and carried the parts of the stills away. For about two weeks after this, we were called out about four nights a week to fight fires. We would go down Tanner's Ridge Road so we could get to the fires quicker, but the road at that time was so steep, we'd have to go all the way around Route 33 and take that road back, because the truck was not strong enough to pull up that steep road.

One night we were called out to fight a fire on Spitler's Hill about 8:00. We went down the Drive to Fisher's Gap to the road to Dark Hollow. The fire made a beautiful sight: it was fire, hit the pine trees, it was so hot that when it would burn up into the sky, it would look like gasoline burning. We had put out the fire and was resting while they were putting out the hot spots. Chief Cave told us to take the truck back to camp and get our lunches. We got the lunches and started back. We turned off Fisher's Gap and went towards Dark Hollow. About a third of the way down to Dark Hollow, there was a logging road to the right. We turned down this road and a tree was across the road. We stopped to move the tree. Two boys were at the tree, two boys were about half way to the tree, and we were at the truck about 50 feet back. As they got near to the tree, it was--dynamite was set off, at the tree, and the two boys at the tree was not hurt. But the other two that went half-way down the road were blinded. They had to take them back to camp. Their sight, in the . . . came back in about two days. They say dynamite force goes down first, and then up. I guess that's what saved them. We got the rest of the boys and started to walk back to camp. We got down to Dark Hollow Road and somebody said, "Look, up there behind the church!" There was a Dark Hollow Church. About a third of the way up going to our camp, the mountain was on fire, just a small fire. We went up and put this fire out. We were sitting there and eating our lunch when Chief Cave said, "Be quiet!" We were listening real good and could hear somebody up above us and looked as if they were starting a fire. So Chief Cave hollered up, "Hey, Ballard. Is that you?" And they answered, "Yes." Ballard was with us, so he knew it couldn't be Ballard. So he told us to sit still while he pulled out a pistol. I never knew he had one. He went up the hill and came down on the two boys starting another fire. He called us to put out the fire and he turned the kids over to the rangers. They were taken to town and tried. I don't know what happened to them. I think they got probation. They told the court that their uncle had got them to start the fires because we had destroyed their stills.

One day a pipe under the road at the Dark Hollow Falls--parking lot . . . is now. The road was different in those days. It made a 90° turn. The ice was so bad, it had stopped up the pipe under the

road, and the water was running over the road and freezing as it did. I guess we had about six inches of ice on top of the road, which we had to pick off with picks and shovels and put sand on it. Before we did this, we had to take a pipe about one inch in diameter and ram it under the road in the pipe about twenty-four feet and poke a hole into the pipe until we came to the water on the other side and get it to flow. Once we got the water to flow and it started flowing through, it would wash the hole larger as it was going through, and eventually it washed the ice out of it. We had to pick about six inches of ice off the roadway, and then cover it with salt and sand, so we could put it down, so when the cars came on that corner they wouldn't hit that corner and slide in a ditch.

There was a man who lived near Hawksbill Mountain that was named Bowle, so we called him Major Bowles, after the show *Major Bowles Amateur Hour*. He would bootleg for a living. He had a nice home and quite a few children. He rode a chestnut colored horse and carried his whiskey in a saddle bag. The cops would laugh if you asked him why he would not arrest him. He said--know that Major Bowles knew his way around the mountains and if you got after him, he would just cut across a field, jump a stream or fence and lose you. He said, "I just stopped trying to catch him." You would see him all over the mountains and in town. He would hide his whiskey before he entered town. If you wanted some, he would have you meet him at a special place and go get it for you.

On Sundays, we would go to Franklin's Cliff and listen to the mountaineers play music. They had a lot of the . . . instruments were home-made. Banjos, fiddles, zithers, guitars, and other instruments; and would play songs and people would stop and listen and throw pennies and nickels and dimes and quarters at their feet. No bills in those days. They played good music for those days. They even played at dances at a hall at Wolfstown. They would make up songs, songs they sang. One about a Ford and it went like this :

(Willett sings)

If you want to go to heaven, let me give you a little tip,

Drive a Model T and you're bound to make a trip.

But if there's any torment, drive a Model A
You'll outrun the devil and you are bound to get away.

Brother bought a V-8 the other day,
He went to try it out on a new highway.
It was going so fast, he didn't know what to do,
The speedometer was sitting on 72.
And all around the highway, the people heard him shout,
"This darn thing's in second and I can't get it out!"

Anther song was:

When you go to Luray, you'd better walk straight,
You'd better not stagger, nor stay out late.
Old Leah will arrest you, he'll carry you down.
Judge Booten will try you, and you're State Farm bound.
Now it's down on the State Farm, with a pick in your hand,
Your wife's done left you, she's gone with another man.
Now when you hear the whistle blowing, about six o'clock,
It's come to get your gravy, while it's good and hot.

And the one about his girlfriend:

Her head just like a teapot, her nose just like the spout,
Her mouth just like a fireplace, with the ashes coming out.
She had croup from eating soup, and I hope she was goner,
She had sore eyes from looking at pies and got goat tails in the corners.
She had an ear like a Japanese fan and a neck like a big giraffe,
And every time I'd see this gal, I'd always have to laugh.

Now Sal and I went out to ride, to marry we'd been thinking.

We went up to the preacher man's house and found that he'd been drinking.

When he asked me if I would have Sal to be my better half,

He looked at me with sympathy, and we both began to laugh.

One day, it was on a Saturday and we didn't have anything else to do, there was ice and snow on the ground and we were sitting on a bed and someone said, "I got a quarter for whiskey if there's not too many into it." So we all got together and had about a dollar and fifty between us. That would buy a gallon and a half in those days. So we walked down to Booten's Gap and went on down the Appalachian Trail to this house. I don't remember the name of the man we bought the whiskey from, but I think it was Harvey Nichols. We started back to camp, drinking along the way. We did not want to take any to camp, so we stopped at a spring down at Tanner's Ridge, near the cemetery. We were all sitting there having a nip once in a while, and three of the men they were sitting on a log that was damming up the water for the spring. And while they were sitting there, the log slipped and the next thing we knew three of them was in that ice-cold water from the spring. That sobered them up in a hurry! Stoney Creek was one of them. We went back to camp and it was so cold that their clothes froze on them while we were walking back to camp.

One time I had--I had been in the camp a good while, it was my turn to pick up the trash. Beach and I were to load the trash and then take them and dump them in the trash dump. The other man's name, I didn't know, that drove the truck. We were picking up trash from behind the barracks and moving from barrack to barrack. We went between two barracks and there was a wire stretched between the buildings. In those days you had to have an aerial to play a radio. Beach saw it coming and he threw it above his head. I was in the back next to the slats that held up the canvas to cover the truck when it rained. The wire caught me around the neck and stretched tight, cut my skin about an eighth of an inch deep. They said Beach was dumb, he is the one we had to give a bath to. But he had enough sense to take both hands and bang on the top of the cab so it would stop. If he hadn't done

this, I don't know what might have happened, it probably would have cut my throat (). I think his quick thinking saved me. The driver stopped quick and came back and took the wire and caught a hold of it and pull it from around my throat. Then he took me over to the infirmary where the doctor cleaned it and put medicine on it. It was okay. From then on, we had to put up only on the top of the barracks. The wire had cut in my skin about the depth of the wire and stopped. If he hadn't stopped that quick, it would have been terrible.

We did a lot of things in camp to pass the time. We would take all the springs out of the end of the cot and tie it with two strings and when the people came in to get in their bed, which we usually did to the new boys, he would put his feet in first and when he hit the bed, his feet would be up in the air and his head would be . . . fall to the floor. All but one of the boys would get up and laugh with us and then we would help him fix his bed and go back to bed. One boy we called Sudley, he was from Sudley, Virginia. He fell into bed and laid there all night with his feet in the air and his head on the floor. The next morning he got up around 5:00 and left camp. We never saw him again.

We would short-sheet the new boys. Take the top sheet, turn it back in the middle of the bed, and then make the bed back. They could only get one-half way in. If they laughed about it and would help, we would get up and help them fix their bed back and then we'd go to bed. If they got mad, we would leave them alone.

One Christmas we had a play made up to put off on a stage, and they got the boys together and they got one of them to come up to the stage and help us. And what they did, they went and blindfolded him and asked him to taste what was in the bucket. He had in hot dogs and fudge and put it in a baby pot and it looked like the real thing. He ate some twice and they passed it around, they passed it out for us to see, and then they went back to the boy and told him to take some more and asked him if he liked it and he said, "Oh, that was good!" So then they took his blindfold off and showed him what he was eating and we thought he was going to throw up. We did things like this for pleasure and just to have fun and pass the time away while we were in camp.

Another thing we did while I was in camp was to build the rock walls that's along the side of the road. We started putting the stone in at the path where you went down to Dark Hollow, not far from where Dark Hollow Falls parking lot is now. That was the first rock that was placed on the Drive and I helped do it. We would dig a trench about six inches deep and three foot wide and we'd put them in place, the large rocks. And the stone masons that they hired from the mountaineers to do the finish work. They could pick up a stone and fit it in place without any trouble. They knew what they were doing. To get stone, we would go down Nine Mile Road, as we called it. About two miles there was plenty of rocks and we would take steel bars about six foot long and pry them loose and let them roll down the mountain to the road. Then we would take a steel bar with three men on each side and one man in the middle. The man in the middle would roll the rock on the steel bar, then the six men would pick the rock up and load it into the truck. They were small, one and a half ton dump trucks and close to the ground. They were '33 Chevrolets. One day I saw a rock that was the shape of the wall. I wanted to put this in the wall. The boys wanted me to leave it alone, but I said no, I was going to get this out, and I worked about an hour and a half and finally got it ready to go down the hill. When you got them ready to go, you would holler, "Fire in the hole!" and everyone would stop working and look to see where the rock was coming from. One boy, Sidel, we called him Johnny Sidy, saw the rock and ran down the hill instead of running to the side. He finally got enough sense to move over to one side just as the rock passed him. We thought the rock had him. We took the rock up to the Drive near Booten's Gap and placed it in the wall. Years later, until they removed the walls and replace them with cement cores in the center, I would take my children and grandchildren and show them this rock and tell them that was the stone that was put in the wall that I had rolled from the mountain.

We worked from where the wall started to about Hawksbill Mountain and then Camp 1 took over for the rest of the way. Then we started on the other side of camp and worked to where Camp 3 took over. While we were working this wall, there was a man, one of the stone masons, who had did

thirty-five years in the pen. He was an extra-good stone mason. He told us the reason he had to do the thirty-five years, he was having sex with his girlfriend and she took a knife and tried to cut his penis off. And she cut it right bad. I understand it was cut about half the way off. So he took the knife from her and stabbed her in the forehead and killed her. That's why he went to prison, in Richmond, for thirty-five years.

There was a big bit stuck in the wall near where I placed this rock. It was about three miles south of Camp 2, Big Meadows. They were drilling holes in the rock to make a cut, as we called it. That was when they were building the Drive. And the bit got stuck by shifting rock. Thirty years later, it was still there. I think it's still there, now.

To make a cut in the mountains, we helped on one near President Hoover's camp. The engineers would tell them how deep to put the charges. At the edge, it would be about a foot deep, and then as the hill got higher, they would be deeper. We would load these holes and all with the dynamite. The holes would all be on a level space down near the bottom where they drilled the holes. They would be level to cut the road. They would set it off all at one time. In this cut, they had 250 cases of dynamite. All of us would have to go back to camp when they set this off. No cars or radios could be in the area. We went to camp and listened for the boom. We heard the boom and after it hit each mountain, it would make another boom. It boomed again about four time. They would take a bulldozer and level it off. We would put long stones, large stones first on the ground, and level them off, and then we'd put gravel on top of it until we got it level.

Our camp was helping build the road that goes into the Big Meadows camping ground. We started up that hill with petrified forest, right off the Drive, and we'd dig the grass and dirt and stuff off, and haul it away, and put large gravel about as big as your fist there, and level that off with rakes and then we'd put fine gravel on top of it. We had one of the men in the camp who used an instrument then would put a string and a line down, and drive wooden pegs in the ground so we could keep the road straight. We got down just about to where the sewage treatment plant is, and we hit a marsh.

And we hit that marsh, we had to put a drainage pipe under the bottom to keep the water from the right hand side of the road going to the left. And we had to take rocks, approximately about 24, 30 inches across, and we put these large rocks down first, in the marsh, then we'd take a sledge hammer and knock the tops off where they stuck up, any parts that were sticking up. Then we'd take the larger rock, about as big as your fist, put them on top of that, and rake them well. And then we'd put the fine gravel on top of that.

Went on out in the field where it was a big meadow at that time, it wasn't grown up like it is now, and went on down towards where Big Meadows campgrounds are, and we laid the road off, we'd get the grass and stuff out to where they could put the gravel and all down. If we'd come to any large rock that was sticking up out of the ground, we would take dynamite and blast the top off and then level it off and put the other on top of it. We'd take the truck and drove on the side of the road until we found--looking for some dirt. It was an orangey-red color, that we would use to make what we called "adobes" out of. We'd mix this with water and make a paste out of it, about the consistency of a loaf of bread, when you're making bread. We'd place the dynamite on top of the rock, anywhere from a stick and a half to three and a half and put a cap in the middle and when we put the cap in the middle, we'd split it, shove the cap in the side. Then we'd make two half hitches around the dynamite with the wire and pull it tight so it wouldn't slip out. Then you would holler, "Fire in the hole!" and everyone close to you would look around to make sure what was going on so they could move out of the way when you were using the dynamite. You really didn't have to get too far from dynamite because most of the force would go down. It wouldn't fly up in the air once you put this adobe cap on it. Some of it would, but very little would and you could stand approximately 100 feet from it, 150 feet, and detonate it with one of these boxes you had that you grabbed a handle and shoved down, a generating-type box to set the dynamite off. You could be safe at 150 feet.

And then we went on through there and went up and cut the roads all in, the way you see the campgrounds, the cabins, and the lodge and the gift house now. We cut all those in there, we cut the

trees out of the way, and fixed all the roads and were there.

Right after that, I left camp. But while I was working on the, putting the road in, a truck dropped--backed up and dumped a load of rock, and I looked and my brother was driving this truck. So I went up to talk to him and he said he was in Camp 10. I didn't even know that he was in camp. So that night I hitchhiked up to Camp 10 and saw him.

We also had a blacksmith's shop and a lumber mill where we could take logs and cut it into lumber in the camp. All of this went along with it. We'd cut our own boards, two by tens, two by eights, two by sixes and things of that sort. In the blacksmith's shop they would forge different things and keep the tools sharpened that we worked with. The tools that we worked with on the rocks was not sharpened with a grinder, although they had one for axes and things of that type. But they would take these and heat them red hot, then they'd take a hammer and beat them to a sharp edge. And then after they got the sharp edge on them, while they were still hot, they would be dipped in some type of an oil. This would harden them so they would be used a lot longer when you were hitting on your rock and cutting the rock. The case hardening kept the points sharp a lot longer than any other way. [on the tape, the following paragraph was dicatated three paragraphs later, but belongs here.]

They would take two pieces of metal and heat it cherry red, lay one on the top of the other one, and then beat it with a hammer until they got it back to the shape that it originally was, and they would weld it together. They called this a blacksmith's weld. () things in the blacksmith's shop. They could heat it cherry red, take a chisel and a hammer and cut it in a shape and make a gate's latches or gate hinges. To get the hole into it, they'd heat it cherry red and take a sucker punch and just hold it on top of the metal over a hole in the line board they had and knock a hole through it, and that would make the place for the screw to go in.

The CCC did a lot for the boys in camp. One thing, it made a man out of them. It turn them from a boy to a man within a matter of about 90 days. You learned how to get along with one another, and have jokes together, whether the joke was on you or not. You would learn to take it with a laugh

and smile and enjoy your life. About every boy I knew that came to camp exception of a very few would live this way. They did not carry hate in their mind against someone. If you carry hate in your mind, it will cause a burning sensation in your body that will eventually control your mind where you do things that you wouldn't have done normally. They would get in a fight and fight like cats and dogs, but after the fight was all over with, they would shake each other's hand, put the arm around each other's shoulders, and probably have a drink or two together.

If you didn't have good hygiene habits when you came into camp, you soon learned to take care of yourself. And that's one thing about the boys in the CC camp, they bathed their bodies regular, brushed their teeth and kept theirselves in a neat appearance at all times. I think being in CCC's was one of the best things that the boys had, from the time they came into camp until they left, in their lifetime. I know it has left an impression on me from the day I entered camp to the day I left.

There was a man in our camp that was from the mountains that they hired as one of the rangers up there. And right now he is buried in the cemetery down off of Tanner's Ridge Road, next to where the Appalachian Trail comes through. His name was Mr. Weakley. He was born in Weakley Hollow, and I believe he lived there for most of his life.

We were on the road working on old Route 33 one day and it's not the same place now that it was at that time. But there was an old stage coach trail that went across where Spottswood Trail is. It was farther back in the woods, I don't remember exactly how far. But we had to go out there one day and do some work in that section. And while we was out there, Chief Cave was telling us where how it used to be the old stage coach. How trees had grown up into it and all, and he was telling us about how all the soldiers came across that way during the Civil War. His parents or someone had told him about it. And then back in the, in the teens of this century, Chief Cave said there was two men working up there when they were doing this road and they found this () [silver?] thing and didn't know what it was. And it was something that was left over from the Civil War. So they had-- one of them had it between his legs and the other one had a chisel and a hammer, working on to it.

And from what I understand, it blew the legs off the one and the hands off the other. I don't remember whether he told us whether it killed them or not.

I read in history books where it says that when the solders come across over the mountains, they crossed in two places, one at 33 and the other one where you get out through Dark Hollow. They say the solders, with so many of them, like twenty to forty thousand, they were stretched from one () valley to the other as they'd march double file over the mountain.

I saw a picture of a house on Spitler's Hill. They said that Mr. Spitler used to own, and it was one and a half miles long on the Drive from Franklin's Cliff. I believe this is the same house that Major Bowles lived in. And we would take cereal - most of the boys was from the country, and wouldn't eat that cereal that they just start () any small cereal boxes and we would take these large cardboard boxes and fill them full of those small cereal boxes, like you buy in a dozen, it's quite a number of them in a package, possibly twelve. And we'd put them on this cardboard box. We'd take the cardboard box down to Major Bowles' house and stop the truck and get out. And they had a, looked like a shelf, made on top of a split rail fence that went around the house. And we'd put this box of cereal on that shelf for the children to have. They had their own milk because they had a cow and kept it at their place with them.

END SIDE A, TAPE 2

BEGIN SIDE B, TAPE 2

We were told that the CCC was an idea thought up by Robert Fechner and not by Roosevelt. I don't know whether this is true or not, but that's what was going around when I was in camp, different people was talking about that Robert Fechner was the one that, really, that was the one that should be given credit for the CCC's. It was his idea for the CCC, not Roosevelt's.

END OF TAPE

Recollections
by
ALBERT J. "A. J." WILLETT

Transcribed by: Joy K. Stiles

Shenandoah National Park
Luray, Virginia

Original manuscript on deposit at
Shenandoah National Park Archives

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Tape 1, Side A:

Albert "A.J." Willett is a former Civilian Conservation Corps enrollee stationed in Shenandoah National Park from June, 1935 to April, 1937. A.J. begins his recollections by giving a brief account of his family background and his enrolling in the CCC at age 14. A.J. was assigned to Camp 2, SNP 350, Camp Fechner at Big Meadows. A.J. relates that the first work assignment for new arrivals was K.P. for two weeks. After this, he describes a typical work day, including meals.

A.J. talks about building the Franklin Cliffs Overlook and his supervisor, Chief Cave. He talks about a serious head injury he suffered and the care he received.

Willett has many memories of the individuals he knew, and talks about their nicknames and many anecdotes. These personal stories interlace reflections of pulling gooseberry bushes as the CCC tried to control the white pine blister rust; camp life, entertainment provided for enrollees; and describing the equipment they used.

Tape 1, Side B:

Willett continues describing the equipment they use, and relates how they cut and moved sod to cover the slopes along the Skyline Drive.

Willett talks about dating a girl from Dark Hollow and describes her house and attending the Dark Hollow Church. There are stories about the other residents of Dark Hollow.

Willett then shifts to talking about the gliders that used to fly from Big Meadows. He moves on to more stories about interaction between camp residents and sings a camp song used to cheer on the camp football team.

The preparations for President Roosevelt's visit in 1936 are described, although Willett was not in camp when the President was there.

There are more stories about camp life and free time, and interaction with the mountain residents. Willett describes a tremendous snow storm and the work the CCC did to recover from it. There are also stories about enjoying the snow in free time.

Tape 2, Side A

Willett starts this tape talking about a still discovered in the area that "revenueers" destroyed. He goes into a discussion of fire fighting in the mountains. He describes the enrollees' fire duties and in relating fire anecdotes, tells how some fires had been set by local residents in retaliation for the still that was destroyed. He then mentions another local bootlegger.

Willett recalls going to Franklin Cliffs on Sundays to listen to the mountain residents play music and he sings three songs he remembers. He remembers buying moonshine from a local bootlegger.

There are more stories about camp life. Willett then describes building the rock walls along Skyline Drive: how they got the stone, transporting it to the Drive, and local stonemasons constructing the wall. The use of dynamite is described. Willett also worked on the roads going into the Big Meadows campground, the lodge and gift shop. He talks about the blacksmith's shop and the jobs they did.

Willett reflects on what the CCC meant to him. A few additional stories are related.

Tape 2, Side B

Willett talks about the origin of the CCC. The tape ends abruptly.

End of interview.

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