

Oral History Interview with

LURTIE McDONALD

Saturday, Sept. 25, 1999

At Skyland Conference Hall
66th Reunion of the Shenandoah Chapter
of the
Civilian Conservation Corps

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Shenandoah National Park
Luray, VA

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INDEX

Page

Index

CCC

Dates enrolled	1
Finding out about, enlisting	1
Gained from CCC, discipline	6
Getting along	5
Transfers - twice to SNP	2
Elkton, Virginia	1
Great Depression	2
Dad=s work	2
Shenandoah National Park	2
Fort Monroe (or Camp Monroe)	2
Front Royal, VA	2
Camp 4	2
Roxbury, VA	2,3
Camp 3	2
Work	
Landscaping	3
Painting	2
Drilling	2
Digging holes	2
Cleaning up	2
South River picnic area	4
Fixing spring	4
Trail work	3
Appalachian Trail	3
Remount Station	3
Going into town	5
Theaters	5
Transportation	5
War work, essential	6
Fairfield, MD	6

Transcription

JA: This is September 25, 1999. We're at the Skyland Conference Hall in Shenandoah National Park, at Skyland. We're at the 66th Annual Reunion of the Shenandoah Chapter of the Civilian Conservation Corps. My name is John Amberson. I'm a volunteer in the park. And I'm sitting here today with Lurtie McDonald. Mr. McDonald, uh, would you state your name.

LM: Lurtie McDonald.

JA: Have you read over this oral history release?

LM: Yes.

JA: And have you signed it?

LM: Yes sir.

JA: Thank you. Uh, can you tell me the uh, can you remember the dates that you entered the CCC?

LM: Yes sir. October the 14th, 1934.

JA: 1934. And how long were you in the CCC?

LM: I was in there until March 31, 1939.

JA: Very good. And where were you at the time when you enlisted? Were you living in Virginia someplace?

LM: Oh yeah, I was at home in Virginia. I lived near Elkton, Virginia.

JA: Mm hmm. And how did you hear about the CCC?

LM: Well, I mean, uh, well I know it was a social program, and it was for people that, you know, had to have work.

JA: Right.

LM: And I got out of school, I finished high school. In 1934 in June. Couldn't find nothing to do, so I, I enlisted in the CC.

JA: What was your family doing at the time? Were they um, were they having a hard time? It was Depression times.

LM: Yeah, they, they, during the Depression, they was, having, you know, time, wasn't real pleasant. We had plenty to eat, but didn't have enough money to spend.

JA: Mm hmm. Did you, was your family, farmers? Or were they uh, did they work?

LM: Well my dad, he worked on public works.

JA: Ok. Very good. And when you went into the CCC, did you go directly to Shenandoah National Park or did you go someplace before?

LM: I went to Fort Monroe. I stayed 2 months, at least.

JA: Ok.

LM: Alright, they transferred us to Front Royal, Virginia, Shenandoah National Park, Camp number 4.

JA: Camp 4.

LM: And they discontinued it. I was there 19 months.

JA: Mm hmm.

LM: And they sent us to Roxbury, Virginia, 20 miles below Richmond.

JA: Afterwards? Ok.

LM: Afterwards. Alright, I was there 4 months. And in the meantime, my mother got sick, and I put in for a transfer to Shenandoah National Park, close to home see?

JA: Right.

LM: And I was transferred to Camp number 3, here on Skyline Drive.

JA: So you spent the last part of your enlistment here on the Drive again? So you spent 2 parts of your enlistment in Shenandoah National Park?

LM: Yeah.

JA: The first, when you first went to Camp Monroe, and you spent 2 months there, what did you do there?

LM: We, uh drilled and things like that. Painted. It was just more cleaning up. I mean you dig a hole here one day and fill it up the next. To keep you busy, I think.

JA: When you got to, to Front Royal and the park, what did you do? What kind of work did you do?

LM: Well, we worked it, it was uh, government Remount Station there, where they.

JA: Right.

LM: I don't know whether you're familiar with it?

JA: Yes I am.

LM: Alright, we worked on them trails, around different places in that Remount Station.

JA: In that area.

LM: Mm hmm. And then um, done some work on the Appalachian Trail. It was close by.

JA: So mainly your work was trail work?

LM: Yeah. Outside.

JA: Mm hmm. And you built new trails?

LM: Yeah. Or I think then we, well, we built trails. Yeah. Mostly after I come up here, in Shenandoah.

JA: And uh, the uh, so uh, your main experience at the Remount Station was working with trail work.

LM: Yeah.

JA: And then you, when you went to the other camp, what did you do there?

LM: Well, it was, it was about the same thing. Roxbury was a wooded area, and we uh, done a lot of trail work there.

JA: Then you were transferred back to the park again?

LM: Yeah, yeah.

JA: You transferred back to the Shenandoah National Park, did you do trail work here in the park then?

LM: Yeah.

JA: So that's good. You cleared trails, and you uh, and uh did you do any plantings along the drive? Any uh?

LM: Well, we done maybe some landscaping and uh, shot at the banks.

JA: Mm hmm.

LM: You know, like that.

JA: Uh, can you think of some experiences you had during your work here in the park?

LM: Yeah.

JA: Uh, any , any special things come to mind?

LM: Well one of the most special things that I can remember, I don't know whether you're familiar with South River Falls picnic?

JA: Certainly am, yes.

LM: Well I helped put water, I can take you right now, unless they changed it. And we put water down to that picnic ground.

JA: And you laid pipes? Mm hmm.

LM: It carried it down through there on gravity.

JA: On gravity?

LM: Mm hmm.

JA: And where did it come from? From a uh?

LM: It was a spring there. It was a spring, oh it was a mile away, and we uh, had a reservoir down here, built a reservoir. And this water flowed in to this uh, it was more or less a holding tank you know.

JA: Mm hmm.

LM: And then the pipe run right on down to South River picnic.

JA: So you had, you put in all that piping work in the ground? Dig all that trenches and put the pipes in?

LM: No, I don't, I didn't help put the pipe in. We just fixed the spring up more or less.

JA: Fixed the spring up, yeah prepared some of that? That=s very good. I=m sure it=s still there today.

LM: Uh huh, I=m sure it is.

JA: Did uh, did, when you were in the camps here? Did you go into town from time to time?

LM: Oh yeah.

JA: Was there much to do in town?

LM: Well, it was, in fact at that time they had these local theaters. You, you know, they, they just ain=t around in these small towns now.

JA: Yeah.

LM: But down in Elkton they had a theater you=d go to. And um, one in Shenandoah, a little town, and then close to Harrisonburg. We went down, we went to town at least once during the week. And then I was close to home, see, and I=d go home on the weekends.

JA: That was real good. Yeah. You didn=t have any problem getting home?

LM: No.

JA: There was enough transportation to get you there?

LM: A lot of times I walked. You see the truck would take you down, then you, you had to go from there on your own.

JA: Right. Right. Did you participate in any of the sports programs in the camps?

LM: No, not really.

JA: No? How about the educational programs? Did you get involved in any of those?

LM: No. No.

JA: Ok. Did uh, did everybody get along in the camps?

LM: Done real good in the camps I was in.

JA: Yeah?

LM: Yes sir.

JA: And the guys uh, would work real hard at their various tasks?

LM: Yeah.

JA: They did? Do you think there=s anything in your mind that uh, you gained from work in the CCC, that uh is lasting?

LM: Well the biggest thing that I have told a lot of people, is, is the CC has, it taught, it taught me, and I know it, discipline. You learned how to take orders, and you didn=t go in there and do it the way you wanted. You done it the way they said to, you know what I mean?

JA: Right.

LM: And they didn=t tell you nothing wrong.

JA: That=s great. And of course that helped you out when you left the, left the uh.

LM: Right.

JA: Did you uh, when you finished up with the CCC, did you go in the military?

LM: No, I didn=t pass on.

JA: You didn=t.

LM: But I did go to the shipyard where. I worked on uh, this essential you know.

JA: Essential war work, yes during that time. That=s very good.

LM: Yeah.

JA: Well uh, the um.

LM: We built liberty ships where I went in, Fairfield, Maryland.

JA: Fairfield, Maryland?

LM: Mm hmm.

JA: Oh I see, yeah. Well you uh, you=ve given me a lot of good information here and I appreciate you coming by to talk to us today, and I thank you so much.

LM: Yeah.