

**Christian Schloss**  
**Narrator**

**Amy Rieger**  
**Interviewer**

**August 16, 1993**  
**Schloss's home in Devil's Lake, North Dakota**

**AR:** When and where were you born?

**CS:** 1911, 20<sup>th</sup> of October, in Russia.

**AR:** In Russia?

**CS:** Right. ... Here are my dogtags. Can you read that, Itasca State Park, 3701.

**AR:** Did everyone get one of those?

**CS:** No. There was one old [unclear], he was a blacksmith. Whoever wanted one, he'd make one for.

**AR:** So you were born in Russia. When did you come over here?

**CS:** 1913. We landed in Esmend [phonetic], North Dakota in April, the exact date I don't know. We left Russia in March. It was my dad, my mother, my second brother and I.

**AR:** Was there any particular reason why they came over? The political situation or the economic situation?

**CS:** He didn't want to get into the war business. I lost one uncle in that darn war.

**AR:** Did you grow up then in Esmend, North Dakota?

**CS:** No, I grew up in Harvey. I lived in Harvey from 1913 to 1926, February 2. Moved to Esmend on that day. And we lived in Esmend until...what is it now, 1992?

**AR:** 1993.

**CS:** 1993. I was married in 1943, my wife passed away in 1984.

**AR:** What was her name?

**CS:** June Kelt and then an s or an o, either way you want.

**AR:** You grew up in Harvey until you were 15 years old. Did you make it through high school or eighth grade?

**CS:** Didn't even make it through eighth grade. The teacher was too dumb, I left.

**AR:** What did you after you left school?

**CS:** Farmed. Stayed home and farmed with the folks.

**AR:** So you moved to Esmend when the Depression got underway. How did that effect you and your family. You were okay?

**CS:** We made it. There were five of us, five boys and one girl. I was the oldest, then there were the two bankers. There was Frank, Woody [??], John, Kate and Pete. That's the six of us. They all left. Frank and John and Pete went over the hill. John was at the camp in Kelvin, North Dakota when he got a letter from the other two guys with a ticket in it to come to Alaska right away. And he had to fight the Lieutenant to get the hell out of camp. He packed up his stuff and said, "Go ahead and keep your darn camp, I'm going." There was nothing done about it. He left. They never did come back. The girl, Kate, she went to California and stayed there. She's still there. I haven't seen here since back in the 40's.

**AR:** That's a long time.

**CS:** It doesn't make a difference. I was the underdog anyhow.

**AR:** How did you get involved in the CCC?

**CS:** Johnny was the one that got in there first. After John was in there I thought, "Darn it, that wouldn't be a bad idea." So I went to Minnewaken, Fred Hunter went to Minnewaken and Bill Brown, the three of us. All three roughnecks, couldn't get them any rougher. We signed up, not thinking we'd ever get called in. Then in the middle of November they called us in to report to Minnewaken. Storms and it was colder then blazes!

**AR:** When did you sign up?

**CS:** Summer of '35. We had to report to Devil's Lake on a Monday. Cold and stormy. This one fellow said he'd take us to Harlow [phonetic]. That was only a half mile from the railroad depot, which was better than where we were. So we got to Harlow, and the next day we took the train to Devil's Lake. Wound up in the Great Northern Hotel. [unclear]. Then the morning of the 15<sup>th</sup> or 16<sup>th</sup>, they shipped us from here to Watberg City [phonetic]. Now there's the damndest idea. That's government business for you.

Shipped us all the way to Watberg City, kept us at Watberg City for one week. They wanted us to fix a skating rink. We fixed them a skating rink; that was right next to the Badlands. We got our clothes on and we headed for the hills. There was one little fellow with us, he wasn't too old. He just barely made the cut. They issued us winter clothes and wanted us to go out picking and shoveling. He put on every god-damned stitch of clothes that they issued and he looked like a bear [laughter]. We don't know what he done. We came in that night and the Sergeant balled us all out for leaving him. Someone spoke up and said, "We weren't supposed to come down here to fix you guys a skating rink. We were supposed to go into a forestry camp."

Well, they kept us that week, then took us into Watberg City, after we'd had all our clothes issued, all our shots and everything. From there they shipped us to Grand Rapids, Minnesota. So that made for a trip across the state which we had no sense making! We got into Grand Rapids – colder than blazes. I was there until Spring. They broke that company up and I went to -- I had the choice of several different companies, but I thought I'd take Itasca, park service. Didn't have to get out and do any fire fighting. God-damned liars! [laughter]

**AR:** Do you remember what the company number was before you went to Itasca?

**CS:** 1724. [Shows pictures] This is the entry way, this is the sawmill. This is the lumber pile, cut lumber to heat the barracks up. There was more snow than there was wood! This is Lieutenant Udall. And this is part of the happy gang. This is Sunday morning. Seems like there were more pictures. If I ever find them I'll send them to someone.

[break to make coffee]

**AR:** So you were in Itasca, where they said you wouldn't have to fight forest fires but you did.

**CS:** We were in Itasca. Do you know the line up of the camps? There was officer's quarters, a mess hall, there was a barracks in which the men lived. Twenty, thirty men in each barracks. I was in two.

**AR:** Approximately how many men were in the camp?

**CS:** Sometimes over 200. Let's see, there were the officer quarter's and the office, where Lieutenant Moses was. Moses was a lieutenant in the 3701. Then the barracks were on one both sides of the road, with a street in the center. Then they had places there for flower gardens and the flag pole. At the furthest end was the rec hall, latrine, washer room. That was all that was to the building part. I didn't help build any of the camp. It was constructed in 1934.

**AR:** What were some of your first impressions when you first saw Itasca and the camp?

**CS:** Itasca was a wonderful place to be. At least you got to see a lot of people. Being a park service camp it made a difference. The other camp was forestry. In the summer of '36, they had what they call the pageant. I suppose they still have records of that.

**AR:** A few. Did you see the pageants?

**CS:** No, the only thing I got to do was stand police guard!

**AR:** I understand that thousands of people would come to see those.

**CS:** Oh my, thousands and thousands is right. And the least people you'd expect. I stood my guard post. Had my star on my shirt and my gol-darned billy club. I'm standing at the gate, and here comes a young lady with two young fellows with her with dark glasses on. That lady walked just like [unclear]. I said hello and they walked by and she went about three steps, turned around took her glasses off and said, "Hi, Chris!" That was it. Dorothy [unclear]. I'll never forget. I sat all day at the class reunion in July a year ago and talked to her. She didn't get to see [unclear].

**AR:** Were you policing the crowd?

**CS:** Yes, so things were kept in order.

**AR:** Were there any problems that you remember?

**CS:** No, there weren't any problems. Everybody went their way and when it broke up everybody left and went their way again and cars were going and people were going. Then they came and picked us up and took us back to camp, which was only a half-mile or mile. Had supper and then back to the tower. I don't know how much time I spent up in that gol-darned tower.

**AR:** You mentioned that before. Is that the tower that's there now, or was it one of the others?

**CS:** I think it's still there. I don't think they rebuilt it. Some of them they tore down, but that one they didn't. The tower, when I was down there, was located right by the store, that was on the corner there. I think it was north of Wegmann's about three-quarters of a mile, there was that tower. A quarter of a mile further, you turn west and you go into the camp. There was a summer resort...Douglas Lodge. I don't know what the lodges were called. Like I said, we spent most of the time at the tower.

**AR:** Look out for fires?

**CS:** No, "chilling time." Cool up there, no mosquitoes up there. It was pretty quiet. We could have had a lot of fun if we'd had the right gang, but we had a bunch of deadbeats. I'll call them deadbeats. If you want to hear me tell it, I'm going to straighten it out. We

spent a lot of time at Wegmann's store. We'd have to run down and pick up ice cream to eat. Must have been an awful fool to walk that far just for an ice cream cone, but we did.

**AR:** Did you hang out down there, too, or did you walk right back?

**CS:** We'd go back to the tower. The tower was the main place.

**AR:** Did you have any occasion to meet or interact with Theodore Wegmann?

**CS:** I don't remember that. There were a few workmen there, but I don't know who the workers were.

**AR:** What else do you remember about the Wegmann store, besides getting ice cream?

**CS:** That's about it. Oh, we'd buy some other stuff when we needed it. They'd have it. There wasn't much we could buy. We didn't get any money.

**AR:** Not much, anyway. Did you camp have a canteen where you could buy supplies at?

**CS:** Yes. They had stuff there, but not what we wanted. About money, I got \$6.00 a month. Got paid on the first. No, I had two paydays every month. The first and fifth.

**AR:** The first and the fifth? How did you work that?

**CS:** Mama knew that Chris didn't get along on \$6.00 a month, so she'd send the other \$25.00! Other kids would get mad, because their folks would keep theirs. But I got mine back.

**AR:** You could have a good old time then.

**CS:** We did. There were four or five of us guys who got out money back. We made use of it.

**AR:** What did you make use of it with? Did you go into town a lot?

**CS:** Yeah. When we were in Itasca we didn't get into town too much. But over at the other camp [the Grand Rapids camp] we got into town once, twice a month. One night we went to Bogey-Coleraine [phonetic]. That was the night of nights. That was the night we had the sergeant with us. He was the engineer. After it was all over with and I'd thought it all over, I could have hit him, I was so mad at him.

**AR:** Got into some trouble?

**CS:** He was one of the gang, and the more excitement you could cause, the better it was. We were sitting in the booth drinking, and he'd come over to each one of us and say to

us, "See that pretty row of palm trees sitting alongside the booth. There's a row on the other side too. I want each one of you guys to station yourself at one of the palm trees. Then when I holler 'timber' I want you to pull them down." I got the first [unclear] and I swore I'd never go back to the place. Of course, he could have had us all arrested for that, as far as that goes. It went on for about a month. Finally, one night here comes the sergeant. He had a letter, but we didn't know what he wanted with that letter. He said, "I'll just remind you guys that at Bogey-Coleraine, the night the palm trees were tipped over, the lady wants us to come back!" Well, it was all right to come back, but I said to the sergeant, "Does she want us to come back so she can throw us in jail?" "No," he says, "business is getting slack!"

**AR:** But when you were at Itasca you didn't get into town?

**CS:** We got into town, yeah. Usually Park Rapids. We went down there one winter and that's where I got into trouble with the truck driver. There were five of us and one of the buddies got polluted. So I threw him on my shoulder and carried him back to the truck and put him on the truck up top. The truck driver came along, and how the hell he smelled it, that I was putting this guy in and bedding him down in the back of the truck, but he did. All of a sudden he hollered at me, "Get that gol-darn drunk out of here!" I didn't say nothing. Got the guy taken care of and walked to the back of the truck. "Get that guy out of there," he said. I said, "Listen, buddy. You and how many more guys are going to get him out? I'm alone here. You might have five, six guys here, I don't give a damn, but if you can come up here and take him out, you're welcome to it." Well, he started up the steps, came up to the third step and I hauled off and let him have it. He went back over tea kettles, and he left. I didn't pay no attention. I started back to the bar again, in the meantime the bar leader came and the rest to go home. The next morning when I got up, and after dinner we were sitting around and something's whispering around. "George Johnson was looking for that son of a bitch that knocked him on his ass! They can't find him, he doesn't even know what company he's from." So I sat and chuckled to myself.

That went on 'til the winter of '37. That went around all summer, that he was trying to find who this guy was that [unclear]. He never found out. Finally one day we were working alone. He was a truck driver and he had to take me to my job. We did what work had to be done, and he was supposed to take me home. That went along for about three, four days. On the fourth day, it came up again about this guy who knocked him on his butt. I listened to him, and finally I said, "Listen, George, you've been talking about getting the guy that knocked you on your butt for so long, I'm going to give you a chance to do it right now." He looked at me and said, "It wasn't you." And I said, "You're damn right it was me! Do you want to do anything about it?" The shop foreman was standing there; he'd have stopped us if we'd gotten to blows. He was afraid we'd beat each other up, so he stopped in the office and called back to camp. "You'd better send another truck driver to pick your man up because if you don't you're going to find a dead man in the ditch someplace." So they sent another man up and they sent him home. But he was quiet about what he said after that. Nothing more said about that guy that hit him. That's really

the only time I've gotten to blows with anybody. There were others that had little scraps, but they didn't amount to much.

**AR:** Would you say for the most part that everyone got along?

**CS:** Yeah. There was always some [unclear], but otherwise we all got along. We all had to work together.

**AR:** Can you describe some of the work that you did while you were at Itasca, besides hanging out at the tower?

**CS:** My job was to make sure there was firewood in the barracks and in the pile, so that they had firewood all winter and for the kitchen in the summer. There were four of us. I was on the saw, one guy was ahead of me. He'd cut the blocks and throw them on a pile. The other two brought lengths of poplar trees up and put them on the table. I'd saw them in two and he'd throw them away. I never got out in the field over at Itasca.

**AR:** Not at all? You were just in camp or at the tower?

**CS:** In the camp or in the tower, that's right. Mostly at the camp during work hours. In other words, I was an army man all the way through practically. From eight o'clock in the morning.... well, the damn bugler blew the bugle at 6:00 to get us out of bed. Then we had to hurry like hell to get out so we got in on roll call. If you missed roll call, you were KP man.

**AR:** Did you have roll call inside?

**CS:** No, outside. You ain't going to get nothing inside. After roll call we headed back to barracks. Had to make our beds, get dressed the rest of the way. Then breakfast time comes, went to breakfast.

**AR:** Approximately what time was that?

**CS:** About 7:00 in the morning we usually had breakfast; somewhere in that neighborhood. Then after breakfast we had to finish making our beds...

END OF TAPE 1, SIDE 1

**CS:** At 8:00 the bugle blew; that was work time.

**AR:** The bugle blew again?

**CS:** Yeah, the bugler called us out. From 8:00 that morning 'til 5:00 that night...we left camp at 8:00 for sure, we had to be back in camp – the ones that were out in the field, and

I wasn't out in the field, so I was back in camp all the time – had to be back in camp and out of their trucks by 5:00. During 8:00 to 5:00 they were under park service.

**AR:** But you were in camp all the time so you were basically under army...

**CS:** I was under the army all the way through. Then on Saturday they'd take a bunch of guys out there and split the wood that we sawed. I never got to do any of that, either. I had no Saturday work, no Sunday work. I was a man of leisure!

**AR:** How'd you get so lucky?

**CS:** It don't take long to learn things like that!

**AR:** You just learn the system, huh? After 5:00 when everyone was back in camp, did you have dinner right away, or was it around 6:00?

**CS:** I would say around 6:00. By the time you got all washed up, everybody washed up, we'd have our eats and that was it for the night.

**AR:** Did you have a curfew? I know some camps did.

**CS:** [laughter] When was that supposed to be! Yeah, we had a curfew.

**AR:** What time was that at?

**CS:** 10:00. It was lights out, no radios going. Well, the lights were out but the radios were still going. I had gotten myself a radio and I figured "you bums aren't going to take that away from me and aren't going to make me shut it off!" So I'd pull the blankets up over my head and put the radio underneath it and listen to all the old dance bands from Chicago. Oregon Phenom were the guys who played there. And some of the guys were mad that they couldn't hear the music. "You go talk to the other guys, don't blame me." But Itasca was dead.

**AR:** Why do you think that was? The personality of the boys?

**CS:** I think so. It was men, how would you put it, there wasn't as much go-getting to those guys as there was with our bunch at the other place. When a few of us went over to Itasca, we couldn't stir up enough interest. We had plenty of other things to do over there; we weren't worried. In the spring, the other two characters over there, they went home. They quit. We'd go into town to celebrate; it wasn't just us guys, we had the lieutenant with us. We'd go into town and find a table and we'd make damn sure there were two seats left, one for the lieutenant and one for his wife.

**AR:** So you got along well with the army personnel?

**CS:** Yes. They weren't that hard to get along with. Only one guy – I got to tell you this. He was a navy man. When we transferred from Grand Rapids to Itasca., we went from Grand Rapids to Park Rapids in the [unclear]. He was, I don't know what you call it, he was temperance or trying to show his stripes, I don't know what the hell he was trying to do. He come up and said, "No drinking on this train when we're moving!" We all looked up at him and we looked at the rest of the boys and didn't say nothing. While we were sitting there we had one guy slip away and told him to go over and buy a mickey, they didn't cost much in those days, and brought them back and we each got a mickey and put it in our pocket. He didn't know that we went and got this. And he didn't know we were drinking until we were pretty near Park Rapids. But he knew one thing, every so often there'd be an extra bottle lying by his chair where he was sitting. He couldn't figure it out. Finally he got to watching us closer. About the fourth mickey he noticed it and he came and picked it up, raving like a gol-darned mad fool. It didn't do any good. He took what was in that bottle and the other guy had one in his pocket, we opened it up and drank the other one and then we gave him an empty bottle! He couldn't do anything about it. We told him, "You ain't in charge of us guys, you're just a navy man!" That's all he was. Of course, he did have authority over us. We used to have fun. That was the only navy man we had.

**AR:** Did you have a lot of drinking in the camp? Was that allowed?

**CS:** We had our beer in camp.

**AR:** Did your canteen sell the beer?

**CS:** Yes.

**AR:** And there were no problems with any of that?

**CS:** Like I said, you didn't have enough money to do anything! How far does \$5.00 go? You wanted cigarettes if you smoked, and you had to get toothpaste and stuff like that, shaving cream. It didn't go very far.

**AR:** Did you get new supplies when you came into Itasca from the Grand Rapids camp initially? Did they give you new clothing?

**CS:** No, we kept the same clothing.

**AR:** You talked a little bit about breakfast at 7:00 and dinner at 6:00 and there was a lunch in there somewhere, I'm assuming. How was the food?

**CS:** There was a noon lunch. I didn't kick under, I done well! I got so fat the guys called me "lard ass!" That's just what they called me! Everyone of those guys had a nickname of some kind.

**AR:** I've heard that before, that nicknames and practical joking were hallmarks of the CCC camps.

**CS:** At Itasca we finally rounded up five guys....let me start at the beginning. We had a flag pole in the center of the parade grounds. We had one fellow-- he wasn't a young guy, but he wasn't all there – they talked that poor fellow into going out there and watering that gol-darned flag pole. Twice a day! After he watered it for about two weeks he looked at it one evening and said, “ You know, that thing is growing.” In the meantime, who should standing at the door and hear this commotion but Lieutenant Moses. Oh my gosh. The next thing was, “All the guys that were in on that flag pole deal report to the company office!” We got it. [Laughter]

**AR:** What did you get? KP duty?

**CS:** No, he told us not to do that anymore. Poor fellow, he didn't know the difference. After that, one night we weren't doing nothing and four of us caught us some dumb thing – which could have been serious as far as I'm concerned, once you start thinking it over – we were going to get four fat guys and take them out snipe hunting, so we could have snipe soup the next noon! Well, we got the guys to go snipe hunting, but they didn't get any snipes, because they went one way and we went the other way and went back to camp!

**AR:** Did they find their way back?

**CS:** Oh yeah, they got back. We were watching so they'd get back all right. We weren't going to let those poor devils out there to freeze to death.

**AR:** How did camp life differ from season to season? Spring to summer to fall to winter.

**CS:** There was really no difference. The crowd got along the same all the way through. The only thing was in the wintertime there wasn't that much going on. It was more dead. But during the summer months, spring and summer and autumn, it was nice.

**AR:** Did your camp duties change at all from season to season? I suppose they needed wood all the time.

**CS:** If there was trouble, and KP men were needed, you wanted to make sure you were on the good side of everything, because if you didn't, your name was on the board.

**AR:** There was a roster board?

**CS:** They had a board that they marked out who was on KP for so and many days. Mine was never on there. The guys couldn't figure out how in the hell I was getting by with that. It was easy. I was on army duty and the army didn't have to work on Saturday and Sunday.

**AR:** What did you usually do then on Saturday and Sunday?

**CS:** Raised hell. [Laughter]

**AR:** Around the camp or the area in general.

**CS:** No, in camp. They weren't as strict as some people thought they were. You weren't allowed to go out there and break things all to pieces. You weren't allowed to go out there and throw cigarette butts and paper all over the camp, because if you did you were going out there to pick it up. It was just like living in a town, the only thing was you didn't dare throw things around like you did in town.

**AR:** Did you have any opportunity to explore the park at all, or did you want to do any of that? The trails or visiting some of the other camps?

**CS:** Other camps, you didn't dare set foot in one of them if you didn't want to get killed.

**AR:** So there were feuds between the camps?

**CS:** Oh yes, there were always a few of them that didn't like the other bunch and this bunch didn't like this bunch. Towards the end they got smart. Instead of sending all of us to town on a certain night, like Saturday night, they kind of split it so that that camp would send some this night, the next camp would send them this night, and there'd only be about ten men from each camp to go in for a Saturday evening. That made a difference because they kind of weeded the fighters out. It was ordinarily easy-going. Just like always, if you get a bunch of men together – I imagine girls would do the same things – fight among themselves. We never had that much trouble. It always started over a good time and the bad times followed.

**AR:** Did you say that you did explore the park a little bit?

**CS:** We did walk around the trails, but don't ask me what we saw.

**AR:** Did you have any contact with any of the park visitors?

**CS:** Yeah, we'd talk with anybody that would come in. If they were there and wanted to ask us a question we'd tell them the best we could. If not, we'd send them up to the – they had a counselor in each camp. I don't know if we'd send them to the counselor or who we'd sent them to. There was someone who explained it to them, anyhow. That was all we could do. But like I say, the camp had to be spic-and-span. You made your bed in the morning and you left for work and come back at night and found the sheets all torn up -- the lieutenant was in: you didn't have your bed made without a wrinkle in it. That happened a lot of times. He wasn't bashful. Just one pull and the whole thing would come off. You'd just have to make your bed again and look for your name on the KP roster.

**AR:** Did you have much contact at all with the local residents? You mentioned some of the resorts. Did you go up there often?

**CS:** No, we didn't. We only got to know the girls that worked at the resorts. Ordinarily, I suppose we could have gone up to the resorts, but in the summertime it was nice and you'd sit down most anyplace and talk. In the wintertime, we never did much work. Too cold.

**AR:** Did you have any contact at all with the park personnel, like the park manager, at all?

**CS:** Yes, the men that worked for the park or forest service, he was there with them every day, because he was a big wheel. He was there every day with them. Me, I was like the army, I had nothing.

**AR:** A lot of times in my research on the CCC they stressed that the boys were getting educational opportunities and that they had educational advisors in the camp. Did they have one at your camp and did people take advantage of it?

**CS:** Yes, to a certain extent they did. It wasn't compulsory. If there was nothing to do, we'd go up there and listen to what he had to say. It was the same preaching all the way through, so we didn't pay much attention.

**AR:** Did you every have a visitor day when people could come in and look around the camp?

**CS:** Yes. And we were notified when they were going through the barracks, too, and that thing better me spotless! The lieutenant would come first, then they'd sent the rest of them around.

**AR:** How did you the boys who worked there feel about visitor days?

**CS:** How were they going to feel? They just do what they are told! There's only one way to feel about that, which is there ain't nothing you can do or anybody can do. The lieutenant says that they want to go through the camp, the barracks, and look them over, that's their business. You didn't even dare say "boo." But it was a good education. You learned a lot. If you didn't go to the meetings, you still learned a lot.

**AR:** Just practical experience, I suppose.

**CS:** Like I said, I was on the saw crew, so all I had to do was see that the log was pushed up against the saw to cut it off. The guy on this end took the short piece and threw it up on the pile, the other two guys had to have logs ready for me to cut. You got tired of standing there, but it wasn't that bad.

**AR:** Were there religious services available for you?

**CS:** Yep. Every Sunday.

**AR:** Where did those take place?

**CS:** In the recreation hall. You could go to whatever one you wanted.

**AR:** Did you ever happen to witness any politics between forestry and the army?

**CS:** Nope. The forestry had their park to worry about the army had their part and that was that. When the big wheels were out we never knew what was going on. That was their business.

**AR:** Do you remember any disciplinary problems at all when you were at the camp, when someone got kicked out or reprimanded, besides having to do KP duty?

**CS:** There was never anyone kicked out that I know of. If I said there was I'd be lying. I don't remember any of them being booted out for discipline part. But they made sure that after your six months were up you didn't sign up anymore if you were a problem. There wasn't enough of that that we couldn't handle. The guys themselves would handle it, they didn't even look for the lieutenant!

**AR:** Can you describe some of the colorful characters that you came into contact with? Are there any people in particular that stand out in your mind from the camps?

**CS:** That was something you couldn't keep up with. Some of them were way above board, some were way under the board.

**AR:** Were most of the boys from your camp from North Dakota or Minnesota?

**CS:** North Dakota. We had what they called LEMs, they were Minnesota men. Do you know what LEMs are?

**AR:** Yes, my grandpa was one.

**CS:** Long-eared mules. They were called long-eared mules! There was no getting away from them. And they liked it, too. They laughed. I don't remember how many local men we had that way. There were enough local men so each one of these local men would have so many recruits with him. They had to have somebody with them who was experienced just in case they took them out in the woods or someplace, so they wouldn't get lost, especially in the wintertime.

Over in Itasca, over in 24, we were in the logging crew, and they wouldn't even let us use the crosscut saw. The LEMs done that. But it got so that Red Raisley

(spelling), he was a log skinner, he had one horse that he'd make about two trips sneaking logs out. Put a log on it and tell the horse to go and he'd go and take the log out to the log pile, and pretty soon he was back, just like someone was with him. Took another log onto him and he'd go again. He'd do a lot of walking! Never once that I can remember did that horse get hooked up on a tree so you couldn't get it out to a log pile. It was something else. I wish I had all the pictures from that camp. I was up on the log/sawdust pile. That was the first winter. I was up on top shoveling sawdust. The sawdust pile was 15, 20 feet high and that had to get spread out so the elevator [unclear]. I don't know what the heck they done with all the sawdust, but I think I know what they done with some of it. They probably used it for grasshopper poison.

Some jobs were awful boring, no excitement to them, and some of them, you'd make your own excitement. They had in the park roadside cleanup. They'd take a bunch out and space you out about 400 feet back from the road and you'd have to pick up every branch and twig that was in your way and put it on a big pile. Then when winter come they'd burn it. There was a lot of it they burnt that way. I never got in on that. In the wintertime after the snowfall they'd take a can or two of gasoline and go out and soak them down a little bit and throw a match to them. It did look different in the spring after that rubbish was all burnt up. Made it look more respectable.

**AR:** Did you have any contact at all with the transient, or "bum," camps at Itasca?

**CS:** I didn't know that there were any! I don't remember any of those at ours. We were just all a group of men, what they were or where they were didn't make any difference to us. Outside of the long-eared mules, that is!

**AR:** Do you remember any of the controversy about the deer population, that there were so many deer and people were feeding them?

**CS:** No, I don't. Of course, like I said I didn't get out into the woods. I imagine there were a lot of deer around. But if there were deer around, those guys that were hungry didn't know how to get them, because if I'd have been hungry enough I would have gotten one. Could only throw me in jail, and then they'd have to feed me in jail. It all comes out the same way. No, I didn't see that they had any trouble that way.

**AR:** Do you remember if there were a lot of movies and things that you had at camp?

**CS:** We'd have movies once or twice a week. Some of them we didn't like and we wouldn't go to them.

**AR:** What were some of the things you did then on the weekends or after work in the evenings?

**CS:** Sit in the barracks and lie to each other. See who could tell the biggest lie! I don't really remember what we done. I know we sat around in the barracks with the radio on, otherwise I don't know.

**AR:** Were there many guys in your camp that had cars hidden off in the woods?

**CS:** One guy had a Model-T. He'd take that thing out of storage on a Friday night and we'd head for Grand Forks. Get to Grand Forks and grab a box car to Edmonton, and come back the same way Sunday morning. We'd get back in the camp for roll call on Monday morning. There wasn't too much...they weren't supposed to have cars. But there were a few that had them hidden around. This one that had his hid up there was a young fellow from Arvilla, over here. I don't know what his name was. And I, like a darn old fool, had drove by my leader's place. If I drove through his town once I drove through it a dozen times. Never once thought about stopping to see if I could locate him. So one day ...

END TAPE 1, SIDE 2

**CS:** ...got a hold of his sister. She told him what she was looking for, and he said, "I'm sorry, George has passed away." All the times I drove through I never stopped to see the old character. I can still see him with the little crooked pipe he had. He was one of the long-eared mules, but he was our leader so we didn't call him that! He would have laughed it off.

**AR:** What were the medical facilities like in your camp?

**CS:** They were just like any place else. You get sick you go to the doctor.

**AR:** Did you ever have to use them?

**CS:** I never did. But some of the boys had to go there. They'd get sick and call in and they'd take them up to the doctor's office, or the doctor would come to the barracks. Nine times out of ten they'd take him up to the doctor's office at his quarters. It wasn't the same as any town. You get sick you go to the clinic; that's the way it was there.

**AR:** There were never any major quarantines when you were there?

**CS:** No. We didn't have time to get sick! Too busy working to keep out of trouble.

**AR:** You were at Itasca in the spring of '37. Did you choose not to sign up again or was your enlistment over and you couldn't sign up?

**CS:** My enlistment was over and I had a hernia. They wanted to operate on me at Fort Snelling. They took me from Itasca to Cass Lake to Fort Snelling and tried to get me to do dishes and things there. I told them, "I don't got nothing to do with you guys' business. I don't belong here." I hounded the captains long enough and the lieutenants that they finally discharged me. My time was up anyhow and I wouldn't sign up again. I was done.

**AR:** Why didn't you want to sign up again, or didn't you have the opportunity?

**CS:** I'd have signed up again if I'd had the opportunity, but I figured that I had done my hitch. 18 months of that and you learn a lot. In the summer of '36, and the fall, we had all those forest fires. They took two truck loads of us up to the Ely-Virginia-Aurora area. That was all park service, government land. That stuff burnt like dynamite. We didn't have any bad luck, only one night. We got cut off from camp.

**AR:** How'd you get out of that?

**CS:** You just walked to where the fire wasn't. I thought I was a tough character, but I was one of the first ones they had to help along. It got the best of me. So we went to another camp over there and they got me into the doctor's office and he looked at me and said, "You'd better put him to bed." He knew what was wrong; I was just exhausted but he didn't want to tell those guys about it. So I went to bed. Finally when I came out of my stupor, I woke up in the morning and it was daylight. I listened to the camp and it sounded like it was raining. I got up and looked and it just poured that night. That was the end of that.

I figured we'd go home. Go home, hell! They picked up ten of us and handed me the key to a marine motor that they'd set in the stream wherever there was water. It had about a mile-and-a-half or two miles of hose on it and they'd pump water down to these peat bogs. That's about all we did. They always had plenty of motors around. If you burnt one up you'd put another one in its place. We left that after the forest fire and I don't think they ever picked up any of it. The biggest waste there was. If anything broke down and they didn't want to fix it, leave it lay. They must have left it lay; we didn't have to bother about it. Take that one out of the way and put another in its place. Start it up and let it go. The guys up the line had to watch the line. I had about five lengths of hose I had to watch besides my motor. But that was another boring job.

Finally one morning they decided that we were going home. It was a nice morning, too. We left the camp up there – I wish I knew where it was. You had to go through Virginia. It's up around the Aurora territory. That's about as far north or northeast you could go on the peninsula there. We started for home, really dirty. We didn't have a chance to take a bath or change clothes that I know of. Some of them found things, I didn't. Every town we went through we'd see a police officer and holler "flatfoot," because all the police had the name Flatfoot. They didn't like it but they couldn't do nothing. It was wasteful. That was where I first found out how much stuff a government can waste. Even sometimes they'd get a cat stuck out in the trees, and the fire guy would just ditch it right there and sneak his way out of the fire line. They had reasons for it I guess.

**AR:** Do you think your experience in the CCC changed you at all?

**CS:** Well, it didn't improve me! Of course, I wasn't too wild and frisky before I went in, and after I got out most of my gang was gone. I was with a bunch – six of us I think – we

used to think we could drink the bars dry, and I mean think we could. We'd drink all we could all day, and the next morning they'd have the same amount there. Finally we said, "To heck with it." Now of the six, seven of us, I'm the only one left. The rest of them are all gone.

**AR:** Can you reflect on your experiences in the CCC and maybe explain any overall impressions or feelings about your time. Was it a good time or a bad time?

**CS:** At camp? I was having my fun. I don't know about the rest of them. If they weren't having fun it wasn't my fault. I couldn't help them. I don't know, I thought everyone got along good.

**AR:** Do you think it was a worthwhile program?

**CS:** Yes, it was. And that's what they should have tried four, five, six years ago and things would have been all together different. I still think it'd be different if they'd do it now. Many a man that right now that is social welfare, but if they'd take these guys out and pay them wages, they'd accomplish something. I know we did. Of course, not every president has the same idea.

**AR:** Is there anything else you'd like to talk about with your time in the CCC and Itasca that I didn't cover? Or anything that you want to add to? It sounds like you had a really good time.

**CS:** I don't want to add anything. I'll tell you another good one, that happened over in 24. We got orders -- they wanted 24 men to ride to White Bear Lake from Grand Rapids, from the Marsel camp, and drive back a fleet of trucks. There were 13 new ones and 15,16 new ones. All Dodges. They ran good but they were beat up as hell. I got a hold of one that I drove. I wasn't very careful; I didn't want to get stuck in no god-darned truck driving job. We got into camp that night and cleaned up and went up for supper, and here comes Skya (the foreman) looking for some men. We knew who he was looking for -- he was looking for guys to drive those new trucks. He called me out and told me so. Gave me the keys to number 13 and said that was the one I was taking out in the morning. I said, "Skya, I'm not taking the damn thing out in the morning." He said, "Here are the keys. You're taking it out." I said, "You're going to push me to take it out, I'll guarantee that by dinnertime Chris won't be on that truck anymore." He looked at me. "What do you mean?" "I'm going to wrap the thing around a tree." And that's just what I did. I bent the bumpers, and I figured that's enough to make him take that new truck. And that was done regular. They'd get some of the darnedest drivers in there. It was pitiful. If it had been now, I'd have drove the darn thing. After I got out I drove a semi long enough that I learned how to do things. I wasn't too crazy about truck driving in the army anyhow.

**AR:** Do you remember any of the construction that the other camps did in the park? Any buildings or anything. Did you witness any of that?

**CS:** As far as buildings, no. But 90% of them were out on that roadside clean-up. I think they stressed that more than anything. In order to get that place to look more presentable than what it was. That was all I could see. They probably had some crews that were doing other work. I was doing other work in 24. There were seven of us that went up to the ranger station. The house that the ranger was going to live in. We had to paint the thing. It was built with logs and some places had gaps so deep that you had to fill it in with cotton compound. We got it fixed so a guy could live there. But it took a lot of wood to heat those places. Many, many cords of it. Had to keep sawing all summer so you had enough for the wintertime and the summer time in the kitchen. He had no fridge, so they had to cut ice and store it in the ice cellar.

**AR:** Did you have anything to do with that at all?

**CS:** I got in it one day. Just kind of volunteered. But you could get awfully cold and wet. Clothes would stand on you like a board. No, that wasn't for Christian.

**AR:** When you were doing the sawing in camp, was it behind one of the buildings or did they have a special location that they brought all the logs to?

**CS:** It wasn't too far from the buildings. It was out in the wood lot. A place that was cleaned out and big enough so they could turn around with their trucks. The saw mill was set up in the center of it. We'd saw the lumber there. One winter morning it got down to 40 below. We didn't have to go to work, but we had to go and split wood. Must have been at Marsel. They broke 24 ax handles. You just take an ax handle and hit it against the wood and it would just snap. You could tell every camp that was chopping wood because the ringing carries that far. But they only had to stay out there an hour or two, and they'd put some other guys out there.

**AR:** Anything else you'd like to add?

**CS:** I think I got enough stuff there.

**AR:** It's very good stuff and I thank you.