

Jack Leonard

Oral History Interview

Wind River Work Center
Gifford Pinchot National Forest

October 2000



Jack Leonard (top row, left), brother James (top row, right) and fellow members of CCC Company 944, Camp Hemlock, near Carson, WA. April, 1938

Jack Leonard

Narrator: Jack Leonard

Interviewer: Donna Sinclair and Rick McClure

Date: October 14, 2000

Location: Hodgson-Lindberg Training Center,
Gifford Pinchot National Forest,
near Carson, Washington.

[Begin Side A, Tape 1 of 2]

Donna: This is Donna Sinclair for the Center of Columbia River History. Today is October 14, 2000. I'm with Rick McClure of the USDA Forest Service at the Wind River Training Center and we are going to be interviewing Jack Leonard from the CCC.

Donna: I wanna start by asking you to state your name, date of birth, and place of birth.

Jack: My name is John Leonard. I've always been called Jack. I was born in Portland, OR., July the 12th, in 1920.

Donna: How did your family come to this area?

Jack: My father was a lineman during the Bonneville Dam construction and we moved to Stevenson in 1936. It was easier for him to be there and the family, so I've been connected with this county, state since 1936. I was 16 when I came there with the family.

Donna: So did you go to school in Stevenson?

Jack: No. My brother (James) and I were smarter than anybody in this little hick town coming from Portland. But my sisters went to school and graduated from Stevenson High School. I came into the CCC's.

Donna: Do you recall seeing Bonneville Dam under construction?

Jack: Oh, yeah. My brother and I were in the (Boy) Scouts and for a merit badge we had to make a sixteen mile hike. Father dropped us off sixteen miles from the dam and we hiked that far for the merit badge; camped over night. During the time that construction was still going on during the time we lived in Stevenson, we seen the gantries start and finish with the project practically.

Donna: The gantries?

Jack: They were the large cranes that hauled the material back and forth and dump the concrete to the dam.

Donna: And what was the meritt badge?

Jack: Hiking, camping, cooking.

Donna: For who?

Jack: For the Boy Scouts.

Donna: So, do you recall the first time that you heard about the CCC?

Jack: It was after we moved to Stevenson. In fact, I tried to get into CCC's in 1936, but you had to be seventeen. The girl asked me how old I was, I said "Sixteen." She said: "Come back when you're seventeen," so I did. (laughs). Down there not being in school we had a lot of free time and it sounded like a good deal. When I really first heard about them, or had any experience with them, while we were living in Stevenson day after Thanksgiving, on the place where we lived there was a big snag. Dad said, "Jack, you and Jim go out there and fall it and make wood out of it." Course, we didn't know nothin' about falling. It was cold, frosty and we'd built a little fire while we were doing this and went down to the house for lunch and Mom looked out the window and the whole hillside was on fire, because we hadn't put the campfire out. Well, they called the CCC boys 'cause at that time there wasn't any firefighters for the state in this area, so they came down and that's where I first got acquainted. Didn't know anything about them, looked like an interesting thing. That's where I got interested. I think I went up the next day or two and tried to get in.

Rick: They were from Camp Hemlock?

Jack: They were from Camp Hemlock, uh hum. Walt Hockinson was the foreman. Oh, I think a couple of the Campbell boys and I forget the others. There was seven or eight of 'em. But they come down and wiped it out, but we had a real fire, I'll tell you that. My mother, I thought she was gonna die. She got out there right in the middle of it to put it out.

Donna: How did they put it out?

Jack: They brought down a pumper, backpacks, shovels, axes; same method they use now for firefighting now practically, not as good equipment, but it was adequate for that one. Burned probably two acres. There were a couple of houses that could have been involved. They did a great job, for being a kid and not knowing much I was pretty well impressed by what they done.

Donna: What part of Stevenson were you living in when that happened?

Jack: Just about where the new clinic is (*on Rock Creek Drive*). The original house that we lived in is gone, but the house just east of the new clinic is almost on the site where the one that we lived in when we moved here.

Donna: And that's where the fire was?

Jack: That was the fire down where the clinic is, and the house next to it, and then back up on the hill, that was all burnt. There was no houses there at that time. The closest house was just across the road. I forget the people's name here now. Anyhow, a good thing they came. They did a good job.

Donna: And you hadn't heard of them before that at all?

Jack: No.

Donna: What was it about what you saw that impressed you enough to want to join?

Jack: Basically, I got acquainted with a couple of kids, you know, described what it was, and it sounded like a pretty good deal. I went in first, my brother Jim came in later.

Donna: What did they tell you? Do you remember?

Jack: Not really. Just that it was pretty good life. They liked being there because some of them, their home life wasn't that great. Plus a couple of them, they didn't wanna go to school -- which I sympathized with at that time (laughs) -- I decided it was wonderful, you know. It ain't worth much, but it's wonderful (laughs).

Donna: Can you tell me about going up there to join? You made the decision to join the CCC and did you come up to Camp Hemlock to sign up?

Jack: No, you could sign up right in Stevenson. They had a little office there, I forget what the name of it was. Anyhow, they had a little office, had to do with welfare, and WPA, and that sort of stuff. Course, I was so young, but that's where I was told you went to get information. They they signed me

up and I think it was a couple of days they said to be there. There were about five of us. A truck came outta Vancouver's Barracks, picked us up, and brought us out to Hemlock.

Donna: What was the process like? Did you have to go through a physical, or . . .

Jack: No. You just went in and signed up, told 'em you need a job, weren't going to school and that was about it.

Rick: Did you have to demonstrate any financial need on the part of your family?

Jack: I don't recall that they did. Course, Dad hadn't been working very long so it could have been a little bit of. I don't know what would be the right word, not disenfranchised, but just kids that needed something to do. Kids at seventeen need something to do clear up 'til they're eighty.

Donna: So the truck from Vancouver Barracks come and picked you up.

Jack: Yeah. I think (quietly counting) about five of us and they were all local kids. No, there's one more. I think there were six of us and there's two of us left. Good friend and he's in a little trouble physically now, but there's two of us left out of those six that joined that day.

Donna: Were there a lot of other local guys who joined?

Jack: There were quite a few. Some after I got out that I didn't know, although I became acquainted with some of them later on. You asked me about Pete Paladeni. He's one of the first leaders that I met after I got in there, which was about the second day. I hadn't been assigned to the work unit yet, so I was sent over to the Forestry Headquarters just doing yard work and that stuff. And they had a lightning strike over on Gumboat Mountain, which is over across the hills. Pete was the main man, I think the two Campbell boys, and myself. Anyhow, they came by and said, "Jump in the back of the pickup. We're going to a fire." That's the first time I met Pete and we got over to where the fire was, which is Gumboat Mountain, which is way up where the road is. So not knowing any better, I jumped off of the pickup, picked up a backpack, pump-can full of water. I think it was six miles from there up to the top and nobody relieved me, and I learned right then never to pick another one up next time I went on a fire truck -- either an axe or shovel, they didn't weigh much. But that was quite an experience. Another thing on that deal. About midnight we couldn't find the fire. We got up there and no signs of fire, fog was right eye level. About midnight, Ross Sheppard came in, who was the Ranger at that time. He stretched out on the floor of the lookout. That's where we stayed that night. Nothing but boards, and about one o'clock, two o'clock, he started snoring and I've never heard

anybody snore like that in my life. That impressed me, add to the whole thing, hyped up and spent the night with -- I think there was four of us -- but we never did find the fire. That was my first experience with fire and my first acquaintance with Pete, which was some sixty years ago. So we've been friends for quite a long time. And you know about Orrie (Heisel). He was lead clerk over the CCC office itself, with the commander of the post and he's been a friend for . . .

Donna: The commander of the post was at the CCC office?

Jack: No, the commander of the CCC's. It was two units -- had an Army officer for the camp commander, and Jess Adams was the superintendent of the work for the Forest Service -- one was Army and one was Forest Service.

Donna: So, the Army commander was in Stevenson, and the Forest Service commander . . .

Jack: No, he was right here in camp. The camp commander lived right here in what was the officers' quarters, were right close to the barracks themselves that the CCC kids were in. Then, of course, each bunkhouse had a leader in charge of the bunkhouse.

Donna: How many kids were in the bunkhouses?

Jack: About fifty. It seemed to me most of the time there were about two hundred out here -- two hundred kids, so that would be four. It was close to fifty to a bunkhouse.

Donna: So what did the inside of a bunkhouse look like?

Jack: An Army barracks (laughs). You just walk in, there's a row of bunks here and a row of bunks there. Big wood-burning stove on each end. That's basically it. There was no tables. Of course, they had a rec hall, but the barracks themselves, that's what they were, a place to sleep and keep your clothes.

Rick: Where did you keep your clothes?

Jack: Had a foot locker at the end of the bed.

Donna: And who chopped the wood for these wood stoves?

Jack: CCC's. I was on that detail for a while (soft laugh). Learned how to run a drag saw, if you know what they are. They look something like an Indian travois with a motor and a reciprocating saw on it; laid one end up on the

log, drove in some dogs to hold it in place, set your blade, got it going good, then let it gently down into the wood and then it just sawed right through, and the blocks, whatever size you wanted, the blocks that fit the stove and then you just split that up and with a maul and a wedge. Each cut can move the saw down the length of the wood you're cutting.

Donna: What kind of wood did you use?

Jack: Most of it was fir. All we cut was down stuff. Well, we'd fall snags and make wood out of that, but nothing green. It was all dead or down.

Rick: How far did you go from camp on those wood details?

Jack: The furthers I went from here would be over through the other side of Warren Gap, on Panther Creek Road there. Then around camp, around Bunker Hill, there was a lot of snags there. In fact, I forget whether it was the winter of '37 or '38, I forget how many sets of fallers there were now, but we felled all the snags that year on Bunker Hill, top to bottom. Used spring boards, which I don't think anybody uses any more, and we used misery whips -- crosscut saws.

Donna: The spring boards that are on the side of the trees . . .

Jack: Yeah. You move yourself up to get above the burls, or whatever, or if you're on a side hill then somebody had to get out on the far side a lot of times, though. It was pretty interesting for a kid. I had a partner, we felled together for, I suppose, nearly a year and we got pretty good at it for kids.

Donna: How long did a detail like that last?

Jack: The wood cutting detail? Oh, probably on the wood cutting detail itself was probably a couple of months and we made enough wood for the camp for the following winter.

Rick: So that would be your job for a couple of months?

Jack: It was at that time, yeah. Falling, cutting, and buckin' up, loadin' out, haulin' and all that stuff. I think that was just on the one winter.

Donna: How were jobs assigned?

Jack: I'm really not sure. Each leader had some skill and then each one of the Forestry personnel that was in charge of each crew had different skills. So, Rip Graham was one of the Forestry foremen. He'd been in logging all of his life so he was pretty much ahead of the fallers and the wood crews and that.

Walt Hockinson was a foreman; he had pretty much to do with trails, telephone, and that sort of stuff. Wade McNee was pretty much into engineering, road building, and that sort of stuff. So, I don't know whether they picked some of the guys that they watched work or how they worked it. But, anyhow I wound but eventually working for all of them. I guess doing most of the things (soft laugh). I'm gonna tell you about that later. Like I said, I was in falling. I was in road work, ran a jack hammer, helped Wade on survey, laying out p-lines for roads prior to construction, a little bridge building, a little bit of everything in the two years. If you were a fair worker eventually you wound up working for everybody because they know that you would do the job.

Donna: What road work were you involved in?

Jack: Widening the Lookout Mountain road, and building the road that runs from -- was the end of the Panther Creek Road at that time -- and I helped Wade run the p-line on the one that goes up and around over to Bear Creek now.

Donna: What does that mean, "to run the p-line"?

Jack: That's your first line where your road is gonna be. You run what's called a p-line or a -- there's another name for it and I can't think of it right now -- but it's a baseline for your road. Then, your engineers will come along from that and do the measurement, get the elevations, and grades. And then you come in with the road building equipment -- cats and hat -- and start building through the stake that are laid and if you follow 'em right, you'll end up with a road.

Donna: So, how do you run a p-line? What do you do specifically

Jack: Well, you use a transit, or in our case on a preliminary, you just run an eye level and a rod. So, you'll stand there and look through this here, it's level and he'll read that, wherever you're standing, or write that down, and you go to the next place to get to elevations, and, of course, at that time you're not worried about right or left, you're just running your first lines. Then that all goes back to the engineer's office and from that the slope and this p-line they'll lay it out on paper, go out and stake it, and that's what, whoever's doing the construction, goes by and he tells the Cat operator, or whatever method they happen to be using, what has to be done and you wind up with a road, eventually.

Donna: So, you'd run the Cat, too?

Jack: (Laughs.) No, I didn't on construction. We were widening the road up on Lookout Mountain and we were bringing the

Cats in and I'd run a Cat just a little before, and -- what's the kid's name he was a Cat operator -- he was on the big one and the foreman, I think Rip, "Jack you and Sonny -- Sonny you bring the big Cat, and Jack you bring the little 20, when you come in." Well, Sonny went ahead with the big Cat and he had a big drum on the back of his and I just had this little old putter, I think it was a 20. Anyhow, we come around this corner, and I turned my head to look at this log, and when I turned around Sonny had stopped. I hit the brakes, the front of the Cat I was driving went under the drum on the big Cat and when it came up it knocked the radiator off. Well, that ruined my Cat experience. I was not longer a Cat driver. (laughs.) Felt so silly, that thing's sittin' there, radiator and the front end of that Cat laying out on the road. Oh, God, here I go (laughs). We had some pretty good times, interesting (laughs).

Donna: You said that you worked on bridge building, too. What bridges did you work on?

Jack: I helped build the bridge across -- I can't think of the name of that creek -- but it was on this new road we built. We built it out of logs at that time, a log construction bridge.

Donna: What part of the building were you involved in?

Jack: At that time you leveled your logs with an adze -- I forget -- but, anyhow, I had part of that to do. I remember when the boss came out one day and said, "You ever done that before?", and I said, "No." "Well, that's a mighty fine job." And, of course, being just a kid, you know, and here's a big ol' guy duded out in Forest Service, it felt pretty good. I think I've always been a good worker. My dad impressed Jim and I both -- my brother -- said if you was doin' a job, do it right, and do it well, and do it until they told you to stop. So we did (soft laugh).

Donna: What kind of training did you get in the CCC?

Jack: Well, I learned how to fall timber. I learned how to run a jackhammer. I learned how to handle dynamite . . .

Donna: What was it like as a seventeen year old kid to get to handle dynamite?

Jack: Too young to know any better, but it didn't bother me. The kid that was in charge of dynamite had been a powder monkey prior to coming into the CC. I was about 18 then, I guess, and I think Skinner was probably 24 or 25. I got to help him on a couple of jobs -- blowing stumps and blowing rock and that. This bridge that she's asking about that I helped build -- just before

you got to it there was quite a outcrops that had to be shot. I helped Skinner run jackhammer, punch holes, and helped him load and we kept loadin', loadin', loadin'. He says, "Well, I think that's enough." Finally went in and helped him wire it up. We got back, touched it off, and blow the whole side hill up, road and all. "Oh God!" (laughs.)

Rick: A road that had already been built, huh?

Jack: Well, you could get around it, but he'd hit a crevasse unbeknownst, so he stuffed in about a box more than it needed and it went down into this crack under the road. Well, when it blew it just blew the whole thing out. Here's this great big hole, here's a bridge over there . . .

Donna: So, then what did you do?

Jack: We didn't no nothing. We just went back to camp and they come back up. Course, they had to build it back up to the road, but we did get the rock car in. You still see Skinner, "Oh my God!" (laughs.)

Donna: He was in charge, right?

Jack: Yeah. Skinner was the powder monkey. I was the helper so I was safe (laughs).

(end Side A of tape 1 of 1)

(start of Side B of tape 1 of 1)

Donna: Were there any other kinds of work details that you were on?

Jack: Well, of course, fire.

Donna: Did you do that a lot?

Jack: In the summer I was on a few, yeah.

Donna: What's the most memorable firefighting experience you . . .

Jack: I think the most memorable fire was the Willard burn in 1938. I was on that one, I think, for about thirty days, on fighting and mop up. They had a camp. We stayed in a tent camp. I think I was on that one for about thirty day, mop up and stuff. That's the first crown fire I'd ever seen. That was quite impressive.

Donna: What does a crown fire look like?

Jack: Hot and big (laughs). We were across the canyon from where it went up. We were in no danger, but it was pretty impressive.

Donna: Could you feel the heat from across the canon?

Jack: No, we were building a fireline and mopping up on an area while it was still burning across on the other side of the Little White Salmon River, and we were on the highway side, where the fire crown was over towards, under Big Huck (Huckleberry Mountain), in that area, so it was quite a ways away. It was impressive. That was where, like I say, I picked the shovel or a hoe every fire I went on after the first one, no more experience for back pumps for me. I was a slow learner, but remember what I saw sometimes (laughs), of did.

Rick: So, most of your fire experience involved building line?

Jack: Yeah. A fire strike down on McClellan Mountain. We went in from Red Mountain down through the Race Track, and back off in there. And there's another one where there wasn't much of fire when we got there and we had nothing. About midnight, or so, Leo Moore ran a pack string when he got in about one o'clock with bed rolls and food and stuff, but we had to build a fire to keep warm. Anyhow, coming off of -- I forget which trail now -- we had our tools and stuff and we sit down to rest for a little bit and this kid -- we had these tin hats like the old tin pants used to be -- he just took it off and laid it down beside him. We sat and shot the breeze for a little while -- I think there was about ten of us -- and we got up to go and Red Nichols, he picked up his hat and put it on but he had laid it on top of a hornet's hole. And far as we know all the tools are still there where we sat down. I've never been back. We just all bailed down hill, he threw his hat, he's throwin' his hat and we all bailed out. I think the tools are probably still there. Never did go back.

Donna: So, how did you get in? You said that he carried things in a pack train -- they used mules or . . .?

Jack: We walked. Yeah, he had mules. Yeah, he packed for the Forest Service for years. He lived in Stevenson and was in his -- two of his sons came into the CC shortly after that.

Donna: Would you be able to say what percentage of people were local?

Jack: At the time I was in there?

Donna: Which was '37 to '39, right?

Jack: Uh hum. I wouldn't think over -- probably ten percent. It might have been twenty of us at one time or another, all local. I guess if really put my mind to it I might be able to count them all, or the ones that I knew. I would think during that time I'm aware of, prior to that I don't know. I would guess at the time I was in there was from say, Skamania this way, there was probably close to twenty of us, which as at that time ten percent of the boys. I don't think that would hold true for the full time 'cause they started in '22, if I remember right, and they closed out in, what, '41, '42?

Rick: '42.

Jack: '42. That was after the war started, wasn't it?

Rick: I think it was March or April.

Jack: I would think at that time that there was probably that many, ten percent, twenty of the two hundred.

Rick: So where were most of the other guys from?

Jack: Most of them at that time were from the Vancouver area. Then, of course, we had a few from Chicago. I remember several from Chicago. A couple from New Jersey, but basically they were all from Washington.?

Donna: How long was the term of service normally.

Jack: Six months. Every six months you could rotate out. Two years at the time I left was the maximum you could stay and I stayed the full two years and probably would have stayed longer. I was out about four, five months before I got a job: went into line (lineman for powerlines) work and stayed with that for the rest of my working life, outside of a couple years off for Uncle Sam.

Donna: In what way do you think the CCC contributed to your later life experience?

Jack: Well, it gave me some skills I probably wouldn't have had. It gave me a perception of what work was all about and I think it taught me how to get along with people, although some I didn't get along with.

Donna: What would happen when you didn't get along with somebody here.

Jack: Oh, we'd contest each other.

Donna: In what way? (soft laugh).

Jack: (soft laugh.) How do boys contest each other? (laughs.) Fisticuffs.

Donna: Was that allowed?

Jack: Not if you got caught at it, but they had smokers, which I've fought in a few.

Donna: They were called smokers?

Jack: Boxing matches between camps were called smokers.

Rick: So, there was competition between the different CCC camps?

Jack: Um hum. In the winter when there wasn't much to do they'd have a smoker here. We went over to Wyeth and up to Goldendale. Then, once in a while they'd have a dance right here in camp. The smokers, I always looked forward to those.

Rick: So, if you were, for instance, having a smoker with the Goldendale Camp would they load up half the camp here and drive 'em over to Goldendale? How did that work?

Jack: They'd take the ones that wanted to go. Uh hum, yeah. Ten, fifteen of us would be boxing and then the rest would go just to watch. They usually had a retty good turn out, it was fun. You got a few lumps and give a few.

Rick: And if you won the match you'd probably get one of these that was full, huh? (Handing Jack an empty beer bottle.)

Jack: No, they didn't allow that in camp, but I've had many of those (laughs). That's the first one I've seen for a long time.

Rick: This is a brown glass bottle that was found in the dump at Camp Hemlock. Can you describe what this might be?

Jack: Looks like to me like it's a Rainier quart beer bottle. I'm sure of it.

Rick: Green River was the brand on the bottlecaps we found. You ever hear of Green River Beer?

Jack: Probably, but mostly it was Rainier. The bottles were the same.

Rick: You say that wasn't allowed.

Jack: Not in camp.

Donna: When you went to someone else's camp, was it?

Jack: Nope, not in their camp, either. No, it wasn't allowed, you weren't allowed to have it. I'm not saying they didn't have it, but you weren't supposed to have it.

Donna: Were you allowed to leave camp?

Jack: On weekends.

Donna: Every weekend?

Jack: Not ever weekend. Sometimes you might have a work detail or kitchen duty or something like that. But, basically you could leave most weekends. Even if you stayed in camp, on Saturday nights they would send a truck, or a couple of trucks, into Carson on dance night -- Saturday night. Then, you had to be back in camp when the truck got there. During the week you weren't allowed to leave camp.

Donna: Is that right? Where in Carson?

Jack: The hall.

Donna: The grange hall?

Jack: No, the Legion hall. That's where they held them.

Rick: The same one that's there now?

Jack: The same one that's there now. Yeah, the Legion hall there was built not too long after World War I. Veterans and Legionnaires formed the Legion club and built that and it's been there for as long as I can remember. It was there when I came through in '37 — first time I ever seen the town. I don't know it existed until 1937, came through on the CCC truck.

Donna: So, you met your wife there?

Jack: Yeah. She went to Stevenson High School and my sister introduced us. We went together a little over two years before we got married. We were married a little over 55 years when I lost her.

Rick: And you said that was a pretty good band there. Do you remember the band, the type of music and . . .?

Jack: Well, the one was a well-known band. They played all the good music. I didn't think I'd ever forget it, but they played all the good music. I can't remember the name of the band. I think it's the one I'm thinking about, but they had a girl singer, real attractive. And this buddy of mine, he was pretty good-lookin', kind of a woman's man, I guess he thought he was anyhow. He was a tough little (?) and he went right up on the stage and asked the girl to dance. She said, "I can't," and he insisted and I forget which one of the orchestra went down and told him to get off the stage, that's wasn't allowed. Joe whacked him broke is jaw, knocked him cold in the winds, put an end to the dance that night. Nobody bothered with him much. He had boxed a little before he came in and he was a tough kid.

Donna: Was that a regular thing, to go into town on Saturday nights?

Jack: If there was a dance, pretty much. Otherwise there wasn't anything to do, just walk around and look dumb.

Donna: Did girls drive from all around to go to those dances?

Jack: Not too many of them drove. Most were local girls, or they'd come from Stevenson, of course. They'd have to drive from there or somebody'd bring 'em. Quite a few of 'em, just local girls. Although, when they would come from quite a ways — White Salmon and across the river. The typical fun — different than what they have now, I suppose, but we enjoyed it. It's all we did. We always looked forward to Saturday night.

Donna: You said there was a recreation hall near the bunkhouse, too?

Jack: Well, it was part of the building of the main office. There was a couple of pool tables, piano, and books, stuff like that. Tables where guys could play cards. I wasn't in the Amy, but I would guess a typical post recreation hall like you probably seen in the movies, guys sittin' around chewin' the fat or whatever.

Donna: Did they ever do anything like skits or theatrical kinds of things?

Jack: Not that I recall. I was never involved in it. They had their sports in the summer when the weather was good, and I never did do any sports, either, outside of the boxing. I did a little boxing.

Donna: Did you train pretty regularly for the boxing?

Jack: Not all that much. We'd go over here in what was then the carpenter's building over at camp, and we'd spar around over there.

Donna: So, the boxing ring was in the carpenter's building?

Jack: We didn't really have a ring over there, just went and sparred around. We never got in a ring 'til we got to someplace else. I never understood why, they never did have a match that I recall here in camp. We went to Wyeth, we went to Goldendale, and seemed to me there was another place. But we always went there and I think it's because we didn't have a ring here probably. So, we would just mark off a square and whack around at each othe for a little bit.

Donna: So, how'd you do in the matches?

Jack: (Laughs.) My first one was a toughie, but my last ones were good, I won 'em. The first one, I think I was 18, and I was boxin at 170 pounda, and the match I drew, I think he was 26 years old. He had been a Golden Glove Champ of Alabama. He was left-handed and he was cross-eyed. You talk about a combination, he about whacked me silly. But I give him as good as he give and we wnt to a draw, and that's the first time I'd ever been in a ring. But, after that I'd done a little better. This was the office right here (pointing to photo).

Rick: We're looking at a low elevation aeial photograph of Camp Hemlock taken in 1939, the last year you were at the camp.

Jack: Yeah, right. The office was right on this end; the rec holl was this end here.

Rick: So, that's the long building on the left . . .

Jack: That's the long building here. These were the — should be four bunkhouses — and then the mess hall.

Rick: The mess hall's at the bottom end of that row of buildings?

Jack: If I remember right, this was the generator building.

Rick: And that's at the center of the right of this complex.

Jack: It might have been that one. And this was the bathroom/shower area.

Rick: That building's at the center of the right of the complex.

Jack: This was the Forestry building garage, shop mechanical. And this one, I think this one, was truck storage, equipment storage.

Rick: That's the large building that's at the bottom of the complex when you're looking at the air photo.

Jack: This one here was the officer's quarters over here.

Rick: Officer's quarters is at the very top, very close to the baseball diamond.

Donna: And how many officers were there?

Jack: There was only one. There was one Army officer — although we did have a Navy commander for a while. We had Spike Jones; Captain Jones was in charge when I first went in. The next one was Lieutenant (Theo C.) Spinning. Then they had I think he was a full lieutenant, a Naval lieutenant and I can't remember his name. I don't remember who was in charge, _____ Elser (?). I think he was when I left, I'm not quite sure about that. Then Jess Adams was the Forest Supervisor.

Rick: And his office was where?

Jack: That's this one. This was Jess' office here.

Rick: This building is at the lower left.

Jack: This was the Forest Service, Jess Adams. The camp commander was this one (refers to photograph). And I don't recall that there was more than one officer at the time. I think, there was just the one. Then they had the leaders, _____, and Bob Green, several of them.

Rick: Those were the Local Experienced Men?

Jack: They were CCC's that were stepped up to a leader position.

Donna: And they were in the bunkhouse with you, or were they housed separately?

Jack: (Lond pause). I can't quite remember. No, they were in the bunkhouse with us. Each one had a leader and an assistant leader. I think Dusty had quarters over — he was the head leader of the bunch.

Rick: These leaders in the bunkhouses, did they sleep in the same long rows of beds with you, or . . .?

Jack: Yeah, uh hum.

Donna: Is that a group of buildings in here? (Referring to the aerial photograph.)

Jack: It looks like a couple of trucks there, I'm not sure. I think storage probably for the mess hall.

Donna: So, can you tell us what a typical day was like? Was there reveille? What woke you up in the morning and proceed from there?

Jack: There would be a reveille and then a few minutes later one of the leaders would come and open the door and it was time to hit the floor. We got up and washed and I think we roused out at 7:00, had breakfast at 7:30, did parade, got your assignments and was on your way by 8:30. Then it was always back into camp no later than 4:30.

Donna: Did you take your lunches out with you?

Jack: If you were assigned away from camp, yeah. Sack lunches.

Donna: What were the sack lunches?

Jack: Same as they have now. Cheese sandwich, baloney sandwich, an orange, and an apple (laugh).

Donna: Any cookies?

Jack: I don't recall cookies. Just a cheese sandwich, a baloney sandwich, an orange and an apple. That's what you took every day for sack lunches when you were away from camp.

Donna: What'd you have for breakfast?

Jack: They fed pretty good breakfast. Eggs, bacon, ham. It varied. Oatmeal. They fed pretty good breakfast. Supper, they were pretty good, typical steak, potatoes, gravy. They always put on a real feed for Thanksgiving and Christmas for the kids that had to stay, had no place to go.

Donna: Did you go home for Thanksgiving and Christmas?

Jack: I got to go home on all of them. I don't remember stayin' in camp on any of the holidays, but they always had good meals when the whole camp was there. And, like I say, there was always a few kids that stayed to take care of the camp and they were always well fed. Basically everybody was treated great. They really did a good job. And they had some kids that were hard to help. Most of them, if they got too rambunctious, they'd just move 'em out. But it was good. I think it kept kids out of jail. It taught a lot of kids work ethics, something that they'd never known before.

Donna: What was it about that taught them those kinds of values?

Jack: I think, basically, example from the leaders and the foremen personnel. I thought that was a great bunch of foremen, they were really good guys. Wade McNee was a great factor, Rip Graham, George Norman. George Halvertson was the leader, but they were all examples of work ethics, good morals. Jack Denny, his dad — he'd come in on Sundays for those that wanted church. They held services in the library.

Donna: So, this building at the top here, is that the library?

Jack: It was a combination library and officers' quarters.

Donna: Then they held church services on Sundays?

Jack: Uh hum, for those who wanted they held a service. Not too many went to it but they had it if you wanted. It was just a neat place for a kid to be at that time, at least I thought so.

Donna: Did they have any other activities in that building?

Jack: Not that I recall.

Rick: A lot of these CCC camps, these larger camps, would have associated spike camps in the summer . . .

Jack: I never got out on a spike camp. They had one going at that time out on Lookout Mountain, right there at the head of Rock Creek. They had one up at Red Mountain right where the road divided — one goes around through the lava beds, one goes on up Red Mountain — up there on your left they had probably about a ten-man camp there.

Rick: Was that close to the Racetrack Guard Station?

Jack: Pretty close, um hum. In fact, I think they're pretty much adjacent there. In fact, I'd forgot about the guard station being there.

(End of side B, Tape 1 of 2)

(Being side A, Tape 2 of 2)

Jack: Practically that whole thing outside of — wait a minute, that building (long

pause, studying the photograph), maybe that was the Forest Service office.

Rick: Down on the far southwest, the lower left hand corner of the photograph of the CCC camp. Now, when you were in camp were you restricted in any way to the camp? When you came back from work or back into camp, was it just off limits or were you able to wander wherever you wanted?

Jack: You could go there (gesturing to tree nursery area on photograph). You could walk, walk back, but you had to get back to your barracks at a given time. But, you couldn't leave the area, say, you couldn't go past this point right here (a point on Hemlock Road), but you could go here, or you could take a walk up the hill, or walk up Bunker Hill, or something like that, but you couldn't go to town. You stay in the area and they had bed checks at night.

Donna: So, you came back at 4:30 in the afternoon?

Jack: I think it was around 4:30.

Donna: And then what happened?

Jack: Then you was on your own 'til suppertime. And after suppertime you could read or do whatever you wanted. Go over to rec hall.

Donna: Did you have to gather at 4:30? Was there another parade sort of thing?

Jack: No, no. You just jumped out of trucks, went to the barracks, got ready for supper. From then on until they blew taps you was pretty much on your own in camp. Like I say, you could stay in your bunk, or go visit other bunkhouses, or go to the rec house, walk around the compound, go fishin', or anything like that. But it had to be within the area.

Donna: Could you have visitors during the week?

Jack: No.

Donna: So your wife, who wasn't your wife at the time, couldn't come up here and visit you?

Jack: No. The only time they could come in is when they would have a dance or visitation on the weekend or something like that.

Donna: So, they would have visiting house on the weekends that family or friends could . . . ?

Jack: Well, you could come but you had to sit out. You couldn't go anywhere with them unless you got a pass or permission from the camp commander, or whoever was in charge at camp on that particular day. But, it was, I think, pretty much like Army life except that you did have freedom all the time on the weekends, most weekends anyhow. They weren't as tough. If you'd been in the Army they would have told you to squat and you would have asked them how long. But in there if they told you to squat, you could ask them if it was alright if you didn't squat. They didn't really have a thumb on you, but they did have it lightly, just enough to keep you under control, was all they had. I'm sure it trained — a lot of them went into the Army after they got out. In fact, a couple of my friends went in and they were on Corrigedor when it went down, and fortunately for me my mother wouldn't sign my papers (laughs).

Donna: So you didn't go into the military?

Jack: No. At that time to get in the service, I was still underage. You had to have a parent consent at that time.

Donna: In '41 or '39 when you got out?

Jack: I got out in '39 so I was still only 19 years old, and I think you had to be 20 or 21, your parent still had control of you at that time. But she refused to sign the papers, so I didn't go with 'em. She done the same thing when I was a little younger. While I was in the CCCs I thought I wanted to go into the Navy; she wouldn't sign them then either.

Donna: Was there military recruitment going on at the CC camp?

Jack: I don't recall any. There may have been, but I don't recall any.

Rick: How often did you really see the commanding officer and what sort of interaction did you . . .

Jack: Oh, probably every day he'd be out for roll call, most days he would. As far as one on one, not very often, very seldom.

Rick: Would they make announcements and speeches, and . . .

Jack: Yeah, they'd do something like that. Well, not Spike, he was kind of hard-headed guy; he never made speeches, he just told you what you wanted and he'd expect you to do it.

Rick: So there wasn't much in the way of real morale boosting kind of talks?

Jack: Not that I recall, most of the guys basically got along, outside of what they picked up from the forestry foremen and some of their philosophy and it rubbed off on some of us, and some of it didn't. They were great role models, all of them. There wasn't one of them that I didn't like. Remained friends with three of 'em, and they're all gone now, they've all passed, but up until they died — became good friends, lifelong friends, like Pete, been friends with him and Orrie for over sixty years, I guess. Orrie and Pete were both there this last reunion.

Rick: The reunion was held at Lewisville Park, in Clark County?

Jack: Yeah.

Donna: In 1999 or 2000?

Jack: This year. Yeah, we've had it every year for — I don't know how many years. I didn't make all of them, but I made the last seven or eight. I didn't make the first one, but I made about four or five in a row and then different things came up, but I've made about the last ten. Like say, there's, I think, 13 of us showed up this last summer.

Donna: Were all of them from Camp Hemlock or were they from all around the area?

Jack: They were all from Hemlock, but they weren't all from 1937, '38, '39. There was a couple older than I. In fact, Walt Hockinson's brother was there and I think he had something to do with the CC in about 1934, '35, something like that. I seemed to me there was one person from another camp, and that's the first CC type thing he'd ever been to and he was quite impressed and surprised there were still that many showin' up 'cause, I guess, most of us now are 80 or getting real close.

Rick: Jack brought along a tremendous artifact here. It's the Official Annual, 1937, of the Ninth Corps Area Civilian Conservation Corps and it has pages devoted to each of the individual camps within that Corps area. Here's the pages for Camp Hemlock, including some photographs of the camp and some of the buildings in the camp, some of the personnel.

Jack: (Looking at the Official Annual) Cramer.

Donna: Trying to remember who that is?

Jack: I think it's Cramer, but I'm not sure.

(Looking at the Annual).

Jack: Looks like they're in a craft shop or something.

Donna: Looks like they're playing pool here.

Jack: Um, hum. This is the rec hall here.

Donna: Did you play pool much?

Jack: No. Just a little bit (soft laught). That kid was from Yakima (referring to a photo in the Annual). That's the only fight I got into camp about, was over that kid there.

Donna: Why was that?

Jack: He hadn't been there very long, this kid from Yakima. I can't think of his name now, but he was just a little fella. One of the leaders came in — he was sitting up on his bunk, he had an upper bunk — anyhow, I'm not gonna mention the guy's name but he was a leader, and he came in and I forget just what happened. Anyhow, he told this kid to get down off his bunk and the kid "Got nothin' to do, I don't have to get off here," he said. "Yeah you do." "No I don't." Well, he went over and got a hold, pulled him down and slapped his face, and he said, "When I tell you do do something, I want you to do it." He was about this much taller than this kid and I took a little umbrage with it and I said, "You can't do that to him." He said, "What are you gonna do about it?" I said, "You do it again I'll punch you." He said, "You wouldn't punch me," and I smacked him.

Donna: And you did it, huh?

Rick: Did you ever pull garbage detail?

Jack: Never did, I don't know why, but I didn't get in enough trouble to get assigned to that one, I guess. Come close a couple of time, but, no, I never did get in on the garbage detail.

Donna: What about cleaning the bathrooms and bunkhouses?

Jack: Never got in that either. That was saved for exceptional people (laughs).

Donna: So, what would you say is your best experience in the CCC?

Jack: Two years of learning. It was all good experiences; I never really had a bad one.

Donna: So, if I asked you what your worst experience is you shouldn't come up

with anything?

Jack: I think the worst experience — I was telling you on the snag falling crew we fell all the snag off of Bunker Hill and a set next to us Ole Olson, and I forget who his partner was. But Ole was on a spring board on the down side, and it was real cold and the tree was froze and he was chopping and his axe didn't come in quite square and glanced off and he chopped through his foot. He didn't lose anything but it really done a job on him; packed him off the hill and, of course, they sent him to Vancouver to the Vancouver Barracks and the Army hospital was down there. Outside of that I can't recall I had any bad experiences.

Donna: Were you up there along with him, or were there a lot of people?

Jack: No, no. Like I say, my partner and I fallin' near Ole and his partner were over just a little ways. You always fell far enough so that if you had a back fall the tree that you were falling wouldn't hit anybody else so you could be two hundred feet away, and that's probably where Ole was, but then we had to go get him and wrap the foot, and carry him off the hill from the top. He couldn't have done it on the bottom where it was easy, no he had to wait 'til he get to the top of the hill to chop it.

Donna: Is that the only time you saw someone who was really hurt?

Jack: Well, I wasn't playin', but I was watching the game and — can't remember the kid's name now . . .

Rick: Baseball game?

Jack: Yeah, Saturdaay weekend game out there, and this kid got hit in the eye with a baseball and lost his eye; that was a bad one, but outside of that there weren't really many bad times, bad events.

Rick: Did you ever need to go into Vancouver Barracks for anything? Assignments or details?

Jack: Never did. Nope, everything I did was in the camp area or on fires. I was never in the headquarters. Spent the whole two years right out here.

Donna: Are there any other relationships with Vancouver Barracks that the camp had that you can recall? Not necessarily that you were involved in, but, so the barracks sent the truck out to bring the boys out. What other kinds of things?

Jack: Yeah, the ones that were in Vancouver the trucks would haul 'em in on a

weekend on Friday nights and bring them back on Sunday evening. Course, all the medical, anything major was sent in. They had a camp first aid, and it seemed to me for a little while they had a doctor.

Donna: Out at Camp Hemlock?

Jack: Yeah.

Donna: From the barracks?

Jack: From Vancouver, yeah. But most of the time it was, I suppose now you'd call 'em a medical technician, first aid man. Back then that's all they knew was bandages and ipecac if you had to throw up or something. Castor oil if you had a stomach ache.

Donna: So there wasn't a nurse stationed there?

Jack: No, never any women assigned to the camp that I know of. Might have been before or after, but none that I'm aware of.

Donna: What about mail? Would you get daily mail?

Jack: Yeah, um hum. They had mail call usually at night.

Donna: Do you know if that came through the local post office or did it come through the military?

Jack: I'm not sure, I think a little of both. I think it was delivered from both. Yeah, they had daily mail call. Must have been a part of it local 'cause I got a letter from my wife, my girlfriend at that time.

Rick: Even though she was just ten miles down the road, huh?

Jack: Well, yeah, girls at 18, 19 write down things. Well, no telephone, you know, you gotta do something. Now they just e-mail 'em or get on a cell phone.

Donna: So, what do you think is the most important experience that you took from the CCC into your work life?

Jack: I think really a good work ethic and pride in working. I became a lineman.

Donna: On the railroad?

Jack: (Laughs). No, a power lineman for the power companies. I worked for Bonneville two or three times. Worked for contractor building towers and I

worked for Skamania County PUD down here for twenty-eight years and retired out of there. I've spend basically all my life, since the time I was sixteen, in Skamania County or attached to the county. Like I said, a couple of years in the military and on line construction for about seven years. Decided to settle in Carson when my oldest daughter became old enough to start school. We'd been from here to there several times and wanted a stable place for school, so we decided to come back to Carson and I got the job at Stevenson as a lineman and been here ever since. It's been a good l ife. Basically I lerned how to work, and enjoy work, and appreciate work, and appreciate others that had the same ethics. It was good training; I enjoyed every minute of it, except the nights that I couldn't go out to go to Carson. Had a lot of good people, made a lot of good friends.

Donna: At what point did your brother join?

Jack: Jim joined the next sixth month rotation. I think I went in the 2nd of October in 1937, and I think Jim came in in April of 1938, and he spent one hitch.

Donna: He didn't decide to join again?

Jack: No, he had other things he wanted to do and did do.

Donna: Were you in the same bunkhouse or did you have a chance to spend time together when you were both in?

Jack: Oh yeah, we worked together for that sixth months and I think his bunk was in the same bunkhouse, just one bed down or two beds down. I was telling you about my friend that went up in the stage and whacked that guy, broke his jaw in the dance hall. He boxed, like I told you, he was a boxer before. We had this smoker over at Wyeth and he had won his match, I won my match and we both were boxing in the same weight class. The next time we went over — the next day I guess, to finish out — I guess it was the next smoker we were scheduled to fight each other. Well, we had made up our mind we weren't boxing each other 'cause I was afraid of him, he was afraid of me. So, instead of going' over to the smoker we got a gallon jug of loganberry wine.

Donna: Where'd you go with it? You couldn't have it here, right?

Jack: We went to a theatre in Stevenson (laughs). We're sittin' there and my brother, Jim, came in and says, "Hey, you're supposed to be over there boxin'," and I says, "Yeah but I'm supposed to be fightin' Joey, he don't wanna fight me, and I don't wanna fight him. We're not going'." He said, "Dad's outside and he came up to watch you fight." I said, "Tough, I ain't

goin'." We went back in the bathroom, he says: "Take your clothes off." I had on the CCC outfit. So he put on my rig and I put on his, I went back and watched the show and he went over and boxed (laughs). Nobody ever knew it. Come back. "Well, how'd you do?" "Well, I won." We absolutely refused to — 'cause I think it would have been a draw, we would have both been hurt, but we got away with it. Had we been side by side they would have noticed it, you know, but he had been out of the CCC's then for about six months and we were identical twins.

Donna: So you boxed with people who weren't in the CCC's?

Jack: No, they were all CCC kids, but he just went over and showed up and I think Rip Graham was in charge of it and he didn't recognize the difference between Jim and I, Jim was a little shorter and just slightly heavier. Anyhow, he got in the ring, I don't know who he fought, but anyhow he whipped him. I never did tell anyone about that. I guess I told Rip a couple of years before he died. "You remember that fight?" "Yeah." He says: "You did what?" He says: "You, you, you, you!" But he got a big kick out of it afterward. He would have been mad as hell if he had known it at the time. Yeah, we had some pretty good times. I enjoyed the full two years I was there. Didn't have nothing to worry about, you know, just get up and do your job. It was a great bunch of guys.

Donna: Is there anything else you wanna add, or do you have any question, Rick?

Rick: Well, actually, early on, Donna, when you made your presentation you talked about the relationship between the CCC camp and the Carson community, and that's an interesting question in and of itself.

Jack: They were, as far as I can remember, we were well accepted and the boys here were respectful — outside of once in a while when they got more of those bottles there than they could handle they might get a little mouthy. Basically, they were quite respectful and enjoyed the town and looked forward to going in, especially on Saturday nights, you know.

Donna: And were people receptive to them? How did they react? They were friendly?

Jack: They were friendly. I never met anybody in town that really had a bad word, there might be one or two, which is bound to be, but basically they were accepted into the homes, and lots of times on holidays some of the kids didn't have no place to go, some of them would come out and invite 'em for dinner. The town really liked 'em 'cause they were a great bunch of guys, unless, like I say, maybe one of two exceptions, but you find that no matter where you go. The town really enjoyed them, I think.

Donna: Did some of the boys go in on Sundays for church, into the town church instead of staying on post?

Jack: I really don't recall. I never did, but it's very possible they did. But like I say, Jack Denny's dad had the Little Church in the Valley down here and he would come act as a chaplain or if somebody wanted to talk and I think he held . . .

(End Side A, Tape 2 of 2)

(Begin Side B, Tape 2 of 2)

Jack: “. . . about mosquitoes. Well, it was about the same thing as the fire story. I was on the trail crew; we were changing signs up in the Indian Heaven country, and went down into the Indian Racetrack down off of Red Mountain then. There was this old sign nailed up to this tree, and I had the new sign and the tools. I walked in, rapped the old sign to knock it off, and the mosquitoes just come swarming. All there was, was a curtain, and that's another place we left a set of tools. I've never been back to that point either, but they're there, I didn't bring 'em out. That was a lot of mosquitoes, just a black wall of 'em, couldn't see nothin'.

Donna: I guess you didn't carry “Off” in those days, you know that spray stuff that people put on their bodies. Were there any methods of dealing with things like mosquitoes?

Jack: Not at that time.

Rick: Nobody used bug repellent back then?

Jack: Never heard of it, I don't think. They didn't have any in camp and they didn't issue any.

Donna: Did they issue things like soap, and shampo, or did you have to buy it yourself?

Jack: You buy it yourself. They gave you clothes and if I remember right, they gave you a little basic kit when you came in. A razor, comb, toothbrush, toothpaste, and maybe one little bar of soap, but after that you was on your own.

Donna: How much money did you make a month?

Jack: The basic wage was \$30. The boys in camp got \$8 and \$22 was sent to your

family.

Donna: \$30 a month?

Jack: \$30 a month was your base pay, \$22 of that was sent to your family and you got \$8. If you made assistant leader you went to \$36 and you got \$14, the rest went to your family. If you made leader, that was \$45 a month, but the \$22 still went to your family, so the basic fee when you started was \$8 a month and you worked every day for it, five days a week.

Donna: So, there's an incentive to do well. And did you make more each time you enlisted again?

Jack: No, it was base pay, unless you were enlisted at a rate and you were an assistant leader, then you would still remain an assistant leader. But if you weren't you just signed over at the same basic \$30 a month.

Donna: How far did eight dollars stretch?

Jack: Thirty days (laughs). No, you was always on the books to somebody for a few bucks. Or, if you had a couple extra, maybe you won \$5 playin' poker or something, while you're loaning your buddy. Basically that's what you got by on was your \$8, but that was enough. You get in the dance for fifty cents, you buy a gallon of wine for a dollar and a half — two if you go together, that's six bits a piece, just enough to get a good glow, loosen you up and get you ready for the dance.

Donna: Once a week, right?

Jack: Well, whenever you was allowed to go in. We had pretty good times. A couple of the kids had cars that they stashed out in the brush down the road and one in a while they'd sneak off and go to town for a little bit.

Donna: Any of them ever get caught?

Jack: I never did, but some of them did.

Donna: Did you have a car stashed?

Jack: I didn't have a car (laughs).

Donna: Just never got caught sneaking off?

Jack: Right. I've walked from Carson to Hemlock a time or two.

Donna: A long walk.

Jack: I know it. Middle of the night everything you hear is a bear. I think you'd have a hard time now gettin' a kid to walk that far to see a girl. I think most of them won't walk around the block, but you didn't have a car so you had to go by shank's mare.

Rick: So, kind of a sideline question: Since you lived in the local area, and you've been back to this place over the years since the camp closed, do you know what happened to all the buildings that were in the camp.

Jack: I really don't. I think they were tore down 'fore I got back out of the service. I'm just not sure what year they did tear it down. I was surprised when I came out and they had those big drying sheds. I have no idea when they were built, I really don't know when they tore the camp down. Fact, it's hard now to visualize where the camp was compared to what's over there now.

Rick: And the trees having grown up. The nursery fields . . .

Jack: Uh, hum. Everything is completely different, it seems to me. You guys studied you might figure out where some of it was

Rick: Well, if you have a minute we'd like to show you some artifacts downstairs when we can, see if they jog your memory on anything.

Donna: Is there anything else you wanna add before we turn the tape recorder off?

Jack: Right of hand I can't think of a thing. I suppose if I scratched my head a time or two I come up with a couple more funnies, but basically that's about it.

(End of Side B, Tape 2 of 2).

Edited 10/24/2000 — Rick McClure, Heritage Program, Gifford Pinchot National Forest.