

YOUNGSTOWN STATE UNIVERSITY
ORAL HISTORY PROGRAM

Civilian Conservation Corps

Personal Experience

O. H. 1419

FRANK DELGENIO

Interviewed

by

Robert Filipovich

on

November 13, 1991

FRANK DELGENIO

Frank DelGenio was born August 17, 1918 in Youngstown, Ohio. He was the first of five sons born to Thomas DelGenio and Rose Schitina. In 1930, Thomas Del Genio was killed in a steel mill accident, after which the family moved to Girard, Ohio. Frank left Girard High School after completing his sophomore year in order to help his mother provide for his four younger brothers. He secured employment with the Sanitary Pie Company in Youngstown, Ohio and remained there for almost four years. In June of 1939, DelGenio applied for enrollment in the Civilian Conservation Corps, and in July, he was accepted and assigned to Camp 2532 in Ely, Nevada.

DelGenio served one six month term in the Corps working as the camp baker and advancing to the position of assistant leader. News that the local employment picture had greatly improved caused him to forego a second term in the CCC in favor of returning to Girard. Upon returning home, DelGenio's initial employment was through the Work Projects Administration. On February 5, 1941 he secured a job with General Fireproofing Corporation in Youngstown, Ohio, a manufacturer of office furniture and related business equipment. The critical factor in his being hired was the evaluation on his CCC discharge papers along with a letter of recommendation from his former camp commander. At the outbreak of World War II, General Fireproofing converted to the production of aircraft fuselages and other aircraft components. DelGenio, a foreman at the time, was granted a draft exemption for eighteen

months at the request of the company. In May 1944, the government withdrew DelGenio's exempt status, and he entered the United States Navy. He served as a cook and spent virtually his entire military career in the United States. In June of 1946, he was honorably discharged and returned to his foreman's position with General Fireproofing. He remained in that position with the company until he retired in February 1981.

Upon his return from the Civilian Conservation Corps, DelGenio married Ann Volsko on January 13, 1940. They raised two daughters, Patty Deak, age 52, and Rose Marie Frandanisa, age 50. DelGenio is an active member of the Mahoning Valley Chapter of the Civilian Conservation Corps Alumni. His hobbies include golf, woodworking, and fishing. His ability to cook for large groups acquired in the CCC and the Navy is taken advantage of by the many religious and veterans groups of which he is a member.

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INTERVIEWEE: FRANK DELGENIO

INTERVIEWER: Robert Filipovich

SUBJECT: baking in CCC, casino gambling, camp life
details, general fireproofing, aircraft
production, WPA

DATE: November 13, 1991

F: This is an interview with Frank DelGenio for the Youngstown State University Civilian Conservation Corps project by Robert Filipovich at 939 Lawrence Avenue, Girard, OH, on November 13, 1991, at 6:45 p.m.

Okay Frank, let's start out with your early background. Tell me about your family, your mom and dad, your neighborhood you grew up in . . . that kind of thing.

G: Well, I was born in Youngstown, on 29 1/2 Craven Street, August 17, 1918. I was the first of five brothers. We lived on Craven Street for a few years, and then moved to the Westside on Waverly Avenue. We lived there for a few years. Then we moved back to [what's] better known as Stop Seven, Briarhill Dis+trict. There, I grew up, and went to school at the Todd School in Briarhill until the age of eleven, when a tragic thing happened in our family. My father was killed in the mill. From then on, I took the responsibility of being the head of the family with four brothers. We lived there for a few years, and then, moved to Girard. I attended Girard High after leaving Briarhill, and I went to the tenth grade; and I was forced to quit so that I could go to work to support my mother and four brothers. I got a job at the local bakery that was operating in the Briarhill District, better

known as the Sanitary Pie Company. After that, I heard about this three C outfit, but I never gave it a thought. A year or two went by, and then finally, I was approached again about it. [They said,] "Why don't you go to the three Cs?" So, I says, "Well, let me go down and see what it's all about." So, I went down and inquired. I can't remember who I asked or where. I guess it was the American Legion. At the time, they were signing the fellows up. So, I was accepted. Then one day, I got a letter saying get ready to leave--but first of all, I'm getting ahead of myself.

F: Yeah. Let me interrupt here for a second. What year was it you moved to Girard? Do you remember?

G: [It was] 1930.

F: That was after your dad was killed?

G: After my dad was killed in the mill.

F: Which mill did he work in?

G: At that time, he was working for the A.M. Byers that was located here in Girard.

F: That's when you moved to Girard. [Was it] near here?

G: The plant?

F: No. Where you're living right now.

G: Maple Avenue is just before you enter the city limits--I-80, right there.

F: Okay. And so then, you left Girard High School in the tenth grade and got a job--did you stay with the Sanitary Pie Company, then?

G: I stayed there for four years.

F: Okay.

G: Then, I heard about the three Cs, and I decided to look into it, which I did. I was accepted.

F: What year was that you were accepted?

G: [It was] 1939. It was June when I inquired, and it wasn't until July that they finally took me in. [It was] July 20, 1939, when I finally left Girard. We were transported to the processing center in Lebanon, Ohio.

F: Okay. Did your other brothers stay in school?

G: Yes.

F: All of them?

G: All of them stayed in school, except me.

F: They all graduated?

G: No. Eventually, John quit to go to work. Angelo, Sam, and Tom stayed in school. So, John and I both left.

F: So, the two elders left?

G: We were the two oldest that left, and the three younger ones weren't eligible to quit anyway, because they were underage. They stayed in school. We wanted them to stay in school. We figured that we could support the family.

F: Did your mom, after your dad died, find a job or anything?

G: Yes, after my father died, she went to work there [at the Sanitary Pie Company]; but then, when we moved away from Briarhill to Girard, she couldn't go to work anymore.

F: She had to take care of the family?

G: She had to take care of the family.

F: Okay. How did you first become aware of the three Cs?

G: I heard some talk about it, and I didn't know what it was all about. They said, "Why don't you join the three Cs? The eats are good. The pay's good, [and there is] good adventure."

F: Had there been any neighbors or anybody that had joined, or did you know someone personally that was in?

G: There was nobody in my neighborhood that knew about it, except a couple of guys that were saying, "I hear you're going to the three Cs." I says, "Well, I'm thinking about it." Then, there was guys here in Girard, who went with me, but I didn't know at the time that they were going. But, there was quite a few from Girard who went the same day I did.

F: You were sent to a processing plant at. . . .

G: At Lebanon, Ohio.

F: Okay, what happened there?

G: There, we were issued clothes, lockers, shoes, and things of that nature. We stayed until they outfitted the whole company. I imagine [there was] two hundred of us.

F: Two hundred?

G: Two hundred of us.

F: How long were you in Lebanon?

G: A week. A week at the most.

F: Okay.

G: Then, we were put on a troop transport train, and [we went] on our way to Ely, Nevada.

F: Ely?

G: Ely, Nevada. E-L-Y.

F: Where is that in Nevada?

G: [It's] 245 miles north of Las Vegas. [It's] a mining town (copper.)

F: Is that up in the mountains, geography-wise?

G: Yes. It was up in the mountains.

F: Okay. I meant to ask you one more thing, too, before we left and got to the camps. What kind of money were you making at the Sanitary Pie Company?

G: At first, I was getting \$30 a month.

F: Okay.

G: Then, \$25 of that went home to my mother

F: Not at the camp, but at the Sanitary Pie Company.

G: Oh, I was making \$14 a week.

F: A week.

G: Yeah. A week.

F: Okay. So, when you entered the camps, you took a little bit of a pay cut.

G: Yes.

F: You were making \$56 a month at the pie company. Why would you do that? It seems like you're giving up. . . .

G: I got disgusted with the pie factory. The more I gave them, the more they wanted.

F: Okay. It was time to leave.

G: It was time to leave.

F: Now, we're back at Ely, Nevada. I'm sorry I did that to you. Remember the camp number?

G: [It was] 2532.

F: Okay. In Ely, Nevada. How many guys were there?

G: Around two hundred.

F: Around two hundred. Do you remember the camp?

G: Do I remember the camp?

F: What it looked like?

G: Oh, yes. I got pictures.

F: Okay. We'll look at pictures, but could you describe for me, if you were walking in the front gate, how it was laid out and what the buildings looked like?

G: Well, this was seven miles off of the main highway up into the mountains. There was a dirt road leading into the camp, which was just enough for, probably, one truck to get by. Like I said, it was seven miles from the main highway, and it wasn't fenced in. As you approached the camp, on the right was two large buildings, which housed our trucks. On the left was the one building, that was length-wise, and that was our kitchen and mess hall. As you got further into the camp, we had four barracks, which housed approximately fifty CCC boys in each barracks; and then we had another building, which was the laundry room, shower room, rest rooms, and [all] that. Then, right in the middle of the camp was our infirmary. A little bit beyond the infirmary was our recreation hall. That's about it for the buildings.

F: What were they made out of.

G: Just wood, ply-wood, and 2 by 4's.

F: What was on the roof? It's not that important if you remember.

G: I would say 2 by 12's with tar paper.

F: Tar paper roofs?

G: Yes. Tar paper roofs. We had no gas.

F: How were they heated?

G: Everything was heated by wood. The only thing we had was electricity.

F: Okay. Was that good?

G: Yes. It was an experience for me.

F: Okay. Often, I've read that the power wasn't sometimes very dependable at these camps. I'm just wondering if it was where you were.

G: We had no trouble with power.

F: You had your own generator?

G: We had our own generator, and we supplied our own power, except for the heat. When we needed heat, everything was wood-burning stoves.

F: How many per barracks?

G: We had two. One about ten foot from the entrance, and then one about ten foot from the rear of the barracks. [There were] two wood-burning stoves.

F: Okay. How cold did it get in Ely?

G: I would say one blanket was all we used at night. It wasn't what you would call cold.

F: Okay. You got there in the summer, in July?

G: Yes, in the summer. Right.

F: How long did you stay?

G: I stayed six months, and I was applying for another six months, when I received a letter from home stating that work was picking up in the mill because of the black clouds that were forming over there in Europe. They said, "If you're going to get a job, you better come home now, because the mills are starting to hire and the factories are starting to pick up." So, I canceled

my six months, and I came home at the end of my tour, first six months there.

F: But, you were considering re-enrolling, then?

G: I certainly was.

F: Okay. You liked it, apparently, if you were going to reenlist.

G: Oh, I loved it.

F: Okay. But, for six months, then. . . . You were there in December, but it wasn't bitterly cold or anything?

G: We had one day of snow in May!

F: Okay.

G: Or, was it June? One of those summer months, it snowed like mad; but then, within a few minutes it was all gone and it was like 70 or 80 [degrees] outside. It was just a freak snowstorm.

F: What was the closest town to the camp?

G: The closest town was Ely, which was thirty-five miles from our camp.

F: How big a town was Ely?

G: I would say about the size of Girard, here. At that time, it was probably about five thousand people. It had one main street . . . I should say one main drag with all the business right in the immediate area. They had their casinos there.

F: Oh, yeah?

G: Oh, yeah. They had the casinos there. They also had one of the biggest copper mine outfits in the world in Ely. I was offered a job there about a month before I left, that paid \$5 a day. I turned it down, because I didn't want to be away from home.

F: Okay. What was the work project of the camp?

G: Our main objective in work was building dams for cattle. We would go out at the foot of the mountains, and we'd catch a valley and build a damn there with concrete and stone that we took from the mountains. This would catch the water that came down from the mountains, and that would feed the cattle that were running around loose until round-up time. That was our objective.

F: This was private pasture land, or federal pasture land?

G: It was federal, because I don't think anybody owned that land out there. It was just to catch the water for drinking for the cattle and the livestock that was out there.

F: Okay. Is that what the area around there was, basically a cattle area?

G: Right, right.

F: Was there any farming of any kind?

G: No. No farming at all that I could see. As a matter of fact, the ranches were [few and far between.]

F: Okay. So you were building dams. What was your specific part of that?

G: I was cutting stone at the time, and I got my finger smashed. As a matter of fact, I still got the scar. I was in camp for a month nursing this thing, and finally, our commanding officer found out I had experience in the bakery. So he said, "You are going to be our new baker." So, I became the company baker at \$45 a month.

F: Oh, that's the highest paid rank and role you could get, right?

G: Yes. Forty-five--and I became assistant leader.

F: Okay. Was that money for both, then? I mean, that \$45 was part of that because you were an assistant leader and part of it because you were a baker.

G: Right, right.

F: Because most guys got \$30, and then some got \$36, but \$45 was as high as you could get, right? Right away you got it, within a month of being there.

G: Right away.

F: That was great money! Now, when you got thirty, they sent twenty-five home. Now, when you got \$45, how much did they send home?

G: They still sent twenty-five home.

F: You got to keep \$20?

G: I got the rest. (Laughter)

F: You got to keep twenty. Did you save any of it?

G: I saved almost all of it.

F: Really?

G: Well, \$5 was what we were used to spending with the \$25 they sent home and the \$5 they gave us. Well, you bought candy, which very cheap. There was hardly anything you needed, because everything was furnished. The only thing you did need money for was if you went into town, which was not often, but maybe once every two weeks. They'd get the truck loaded and say, "Who wants to go to town?" Then, you'd go in there, and you'd either gamble or buy a souvenir or something like that. Actually, money was no problem to us--not to me; because I didn't need the money.

F: Most of the other guys got along well with the \$5? That was enough?

G: That's right. I think most of the guys that went to camp with me, they got along with \$5.

F: Okay. Now, you're the baker. Did you have to work every day?

G: I worked every day. I started at eight in the morning. After the guys would be loaded onto their trucks and everything and sent out in the hill there, I would start getting my things ready to bake: pies, bread, rolls. The first thing I'd have to do was make sure I had enough wood to heat my oven. I had a 5 by 3 by 6 foot oven with six shelves. On the bottom was a place where I put the wood in and lit it. Then, I would have a thermometer up on top that would tell me the degree. All I had to do was watch that thermometer.

F: Okay. You made your own dough, you baked it, and you hauled your own wood. You were the whole show.

G: I was the whole thing.

F: Did you have help?

G: No help.

F: None at all.

G: No help.

F: You started at eight, you said, when the guys left. You didn't have to make anything for their breakfast before they left?

G: The only thing I had to make was for supper, and that was all ready for them when they came back again around three or three-thirty.

F: Your only responsibility was for supper?

G: Supper. Yes.

F: Still, that's a lot--two hundred guys. I mean that's a lot of baking. Would they have fresh bread every night for supper?

G: Fresh bread? No.

F: Really?

G: But, they weren't what you'd call bread-eaters. They liked pies, and they liked cinnamon rolls.

F: Yeah, everybody likes cinnamon rolls!

G: This is what they would always tell me to bake. [They'd say,] "Hey, you going to have cinnamon rolls today?" I'd say, "Is that what you want?" "Yeah, give us cinnamon rolls." I'd say, "Okay," but sometimes the captain would come in, or the lieutenant would come in and say, "What are you baking today?" I'd say, "Well, they want cinnamon rolls." [He'd say,] "Cinnamon rolls, again," because he had to eat cinnamon rolls, too. [Laughter]. He said, "How about some pies or cakes or--" I said, "Okay, if you want cake, you tell me when you want it, and I'll bake it."

F: Where did you get your supplies? Did you order them yourself?

G: Everything was in our supply room. I had nothing to worry about supplies. When I wanted anything, I would go right to the storeroom, and it was there.

F: There was no problem?

G: No problem.

F: That was bought locally?

G: It was brought in. All our supplies were brought in once a month by a big semi. I mean, it was loaded with fresh meat and stuff like that. We'd send a truck in, probably, every other day into town to pick up a load of fresh meat or whatever. Now, fish, we had that

maybe once every ten days or something like that. You wouldn't get fish like that. You'd get a steak like t-bone. They'd have it ready for you for supper, and it was baked, of course. I didn't know how they fixed it, I didn't care for fish at that time anyhow, because I used to fix myself something else. (Laughter).

F: I talked to some other people that were cooks, and they said they'd cook [for] two days, and they'd have a day off or something. But, you never had a day off? You cooked, baked seven days a week?

G: Seven days a week. Even our cooks work seven days a week.

F: Really?

G: Right.

F: The rest of the guys would have, like, Saturday and Sunday off, correct?

G: No. Oh, you mean the workers?

F: The workers.

G: Right. Saturday and Sunday was [a day] off, but I had to cook. I had to work seven days a week.

F: Well, maybe that's why you got more money then, I guess, because you were working a full week. Let's go onto food. Let's stick with it. Apparently, the food was good.

G: Very good.

F: From your end of it, as one of the guys that prepared it, there was no problem with you getting--whatever you wanted to bake, they would supply for you?

G: Right.

F: That's great! Did you gain weight?

G: About thirty pounds. (Laughter).

F: Yeah. You ate some of your own cinnamon rolls! (Laughter). The average was eight pounds, by the way, so you went right past the average. (Laughter).

G: I went in at 139 and when I came out, I was pretty close to a 160.

F: And that's in six months. . . . Did your mom recognize you when you came home?

G: Oh yeah, she recognized me! (Laughter).

F: How about those clothes you got in Lebanon, Ohio? Do they still fit? (Laughter).

G: Well, I had to let some of them out. We had our laundry boy--the guy who used to do the ironing for us and everything. You'd give him a quarter, and he would iron your clothes for you. [He would] put the pleats in your shirt and everything. If it got too tight for your or something like that, he would let a little bit out the back. But then, they usually gave you clothes that were big for you when you went in.

F: Okay. What kind of uniforms did you get?

G: It was all army issue. [They were] khaki summer clothes and the woolen, brown. . . .

F: [Where they] called "drabs?"

G: Everything was all army issue.

F: So, you had two uniforms?

G: Yeah.

F: The tan and the olive drabs?

G: Right, right.

F: Then, work clothes.

G: Work clothes. . . . They used to call them blue denims or something--yeah, blue denims.

F: I was going to ask you something about your bosses. Did you have one, or were you your own boss?

G: No, I was my own boss.

F: Was there a head chef?

G: There was a chief, and he would come in and look to see what they were cooking. [He would] look to see what I was doing. I think he made the menu up. I'm not sure, because I wasn't too familiar with who made the menu up. But, as far as the baking, I was my own boss. Whatever I felt that they wanted for supper, that's what I made. (Laughter) The guys that hollered the most, that's what I made.

F: I was going to say, "So, you got along well with the boss then, right?" (Laughter). The chief . . . was he military or civilian?

G: He was military.

F: He was one of the officers. Okay. Let's talk about the military for a little bit. I think you already said the lieutenant. Was the commanding officer a lieutenant?

G: A lieutenant. We had two lieutenants. We had a sergeant and the chief cook there. I don't know what he was . . . his rank.

F: But, he was military.

G: He was military, and we had a military doctor.

F: Okay. I was going to ask you that, too. Do you remember the commanding officer's name?

G: We had a Lieutenant Alfred Prosper. (Digging in a file).

F: It's not critical.

G: Oh, I got all the names right here. A lieutenant Prosper was one of them.

F: Were these regular army?

G: Yeah, these were regular army men.

F: How did you get along with them?

G: Good! Real good.

F: Most of the camp got along good.

G: We had no trouble with any of the officers. As a matter of fact, they were great.

F: So, you were. . . . Let's see, you went in 1939, and you were born in 1918; so you were probably one of the older guys there. You were twenty-one years old when you went in there?

G: Yes.

F: A lieutenant wouldn't probably be that much older than you, would he?

G: No. This was a young guy. Here, you want to see what he looks like? I'll show you.

F: Okay. So, this wasn't a father figure. This guy was pretty close to your own age?

G: Yeah. He may have been a few years older.

F: And, most of the camp guys got along well with him?

G: Real good. He was real good. [He was] one of the best. As a matter of fact, at night, we wouldn't even see him. He would take off and go into town.

F: Okay. The irrigation projects you were on . . . the dams that were being built, who were the civilian supervisors on those? Were they any kind of government personnel?

G: Right. They were all government personnel.

F: Department of Agriculture?

G: Right. I think our camp was DG--Department of Agriculture--21.

F: Okay. I'm going to bring up some different aspects of camp life, and you just comment on them as much as you want. We already talked about the food. You said the doctor was military.

G: He was military, yeah?

F: How was the medical care?

G: None of us needed medical care. We were all in good shape, except for [when I hurt] my hand, and there may have been an upset stomach or something like that. But, he was a regular guy.

F: How about work related injuries? Did anybody get hurt on the job? Was there much of that?

G: I was the only one that got hurt.

F: Okay. Did you smash your finger or something?

G: Yes. I smashed my finger. I was holding a chisel, and we were cutting the stone. He was talking to somebody, he looked up, and come down with the sledge hammer. Instead of hitting the chisel, he hit my finger. That was it. We did have one who got sick. I think that the doctor couldn't diagnose what he had, so they sent him to the nearest fort. I can't remember what the name of that fort was. They had to transfer him by truck. I never did find out what happened to him.

F: Okay. What about educational classes at the camp?

G: We had none.

F: None whatsoever?

G: None whatsoever.

F: Okay. That's interesting. They were supposed to have been at all camps.

G: Yeah, I know; but we didn't have any educational classes of any kind.

F: What about desertion? Was desertion a problem?

G: None.

F: Zero.

G: Nobody that I know of deserted.

F: Anybody get homesick right after you got there and just said, "No, I don't like this," and just turned around and left?

G: No. Nobody got homesick either.

F: You said a lot of guys from Girard went down with you to Lebanon. How many of the guys in Nevada were from Ohio?

G: Three that I know of, and I see two of them regularly; but one I don't see anymore. I don't know what happened to him. There's a lot of them from Youngstown, and quite a few were from Warren.

F: So, there was a lot of Ohio guys there?

G: Oh, the majority was from Ohio . . . most from this area.

F: Okay. What other state? Do you remember?

G: Not state, but the farthest was Cleveland.

F: Okay. But, the whole camp wasn't Ohio, was it?

G: The whole camp was all Ohio.

F: Really? That's unusual. How military were the camps? You said that sometimes you didn't see the town all that often. Was there reveille and retreat?

G: That's the only thing that we had to do. [We had to] get up in the morning and line up for the role call, salute the flag, go back to the barracks; and then, our day would start. Then, at night at five-thirty or five o'clock, we'd line up again for role call, salute the flag as it came down, and go to supper. That was the extent of the military.

F: Were there inspections?

G: Yes, about once a week. The sergeant would come in with the lieutenant and inspect the barracks, our bunks. Short arm, if you know what that is. (Laughter). Short arm inspection. . . . [They would] see how clean we were, how clean the barracks and our beds were. [They would] see if our mattresses were in tip top shape. [They would check] our blankets, our clothes, and so forth.

F: This was once a week?

G: This was once a week.

F: Was it a good inspection?

G: Good, real good.

F: You later joined the Navy. Was it as good an inspection as you went through in the Navy?

G: Oh, this wouldn't compare to the Navy.

F: The Navy was harder?

G: Oh my God! The Navy! If you had a shirt rolled up. . . . The way we were taught to roll the shirt up, if that shirt didn't bounce when you threw it and [it] hit the ground, you were in trouble.

F: Really? So, this was a pretty casual inspection compared to the Navy?

G: Just to keep it on the up and up. Make sure that everybody stayed clean.

F: What about camp discipline? Was it like military discipline? Were there discipline problems? Were there many?

G: Discipline? I mean, we had rules like no beer, you know . . . stuff that was brought from town. They didn't want you to get drunk. If you went into town, be careful of what you did in town. Don't go getting messed up with anybody down there, because if you did,

you're in trouble. Do your work like you're supposed to, and that was it.

F: Was discipline a problem?

G: No.

F: Were there fist-fights?

G: No.

F: In the six months you were there. . . .

G: One.

F: Do you remember what happened? Were they caught or even disciplined?

G: A boy from Campbell didn't like the kid from Youngstown, and he picked a fight. It only lasted maybe five seconds. It started out that they were supposed to spar. As a matter of fact, it was Mike Burskovich. If you remember, he went into professional boxing after he left the three Cs. He could have been the middleweight champion if he'd had a good manager. He was known as Joe Palooka, Mike Burskovich. They wanted to spar a little bit, and that is where Mike Burskovich learned his boxing. The fellow from Campbell says, "Well, hey Red, how about me and you sparring a little bit?" So, they put the gloves on. Before you knew it, this guy from Campbell wanted to lay this Red out, because he didn't like him. Like I said, it only lasted a few seconds, and it was all over with. Red knew what was coming on, and he quit. That was the only fight that I know that took place.

F: So, there were no serious discipline problems.

G: No. No serious discipline.

F: Did guys often get drunk in town?

G: They went in and had a good time. They didn't get drunk. They just went in and had a good time.

F: So, that wasn't a problem?

G: No. They gambled with the few dollars that they had. Some of them won money, and some of them lost. They came back, and they were happy. That was it.

F: Ely, you said, was thirty-five miles away. You piled in a truck and went down. This was Saturday night?

G: Yes, Saturday night. They'd pile everybody in a truck around four o'clock, and they'd haul them into town. They had a special time to be at that spot, otherwise you'd be left in town. Sure enough, they were all there, whether they were half drunk, or whatever, feeling good; but everybody got back.

F: Did you go to town often?

G: I went one time.

F: Just once?

G: I had no reason to go into town. I went in to see what it was all about.

F: Nothing there that interests you?

G: Well, they had the houses, and I wasn't interested in that. I went in to see the gambling. I never saw gambling [before]--slot machines, stuff like that.

F: What were the slot machines like back then? This is 1939, right?

G: Well, if you remember the old, old western pictures where you walked into a saloon? Well, that was what it was like.

F: Really?

G: As a matter of fact, I've got some silver dollars that I picked up down there that are worth money today.

F: What was the majority of the gambling? Did they have slot machines?

G: Yeah. They had slot machines.

F: They were mechanical ones?

G: Yes, mechanical. They were all old things. Well, if you won \$200, which one of my buddies did win, you were escorted out of there by a guard with a machine gun.

F: Really?

G: The fellow that won the \$200 was from Niles . . . Domenick Degatti. He won \$200, and they paid him in silver dollars!

F: Two hundred silver dollars?

G: Two hundred silver dollars. They wouldn't give paper money, because the paper money was theirs. They could

handle paper money better than they could handle silver dollars.

F: Was there more than one casino.

G: Oh, gosh, yes! There was seven or eight on one side and seven or eight on the other side. . . .

F: Really?

G: Yes.

F: This is a town. . . . Ely, you told me, [had] about five thousand people?

G: About five thousand people.

F: Did tourists come to Ely?

G: No. I didn't see any tourists at all. It wasn't the tourists. All these miners would come in.

F: I was asking. . . . You're talking about ten or twelve casinos here? Who was. . . .

G: It was all the miners, gold diggers, who would come in. Guys that were working at the copper mines would come in on Saturday night and blow their money.

F: It seems like there would have to be a lot of people to support that many. Was there any entertainment at these casinos like there is now?

G: I didn't see any entertainment at all.

F: Strictly gambling?

G: Strictly gambling, with two or three guys up on the cat walk with machine guns. (Laughter).

F: Really?

G: I didn't have the camera at the time. I don't think anybody was allowed to take any pictures, because my buddy--he lives in Youngstown--had a camera. We both worked in our spare time in the photo lab. That's how come I got so many pictures. No pictures were allowed to be taken.

F: Did you ever hear of any incident where one of those machine guns ever went off?

G: No.

F: I mean, what would they be shooting at? Someone trying to cheat or just rob the place?

G: You know what that is. . . . 1939 was almost like the old western days. Some of them guys still carried their side arms.

F: Some of the customers were armed?

G: Right. These guys were up in the mountains for months at a time, digging for gold; and they still had their six-shooters with them.

F: They took them into the casinos?

G: They came in there with their guns, and this is what they were afraid of. They weren't going to throw them out, because these guys had gold.

F: That's just interesting, very interesting.

G: The time that I spent there was the greatest six months of my life.

F: If you can, describe in a little more detail, the inside of that casino. How big of a place was it?

G: It was a one floor plan, and the machines were along the wall.

F: The slot machines were along the outside wall?

G: Yes, the outside wall. There was two or three rows in the center. I don't know what type they were. I think most of the machines there were all silver dollars. They were all dollar machines, from what I could see. Let's see, how big was this place? Was you ever at the American Legion in Girard?

F: No. Compare it to a barracks. Your barracks were 100 feet by 20 [feet]? Was it twice as big? Three times as big?

G: I would say it was probably 100 by 100 [feet], something like that, square.

F: Was it pretty full, when you were there?

G: Oh, yes. It was always full.

F: It was always full?

G: Of course, I only went once.

F: Okay. Yeah, I understand.

G: When I was in there, it was full.

F: Beside the slot machines, were there crap tables, black jack, or that kind of thing?

G: I didn't see any, unless they were in another part of the building, because I didn't stay too long in there. What I did was walked around and shopped a little bit. If I'm not mistaken, at that time, the truck made two trips going back to the camp. I took the early truck back. I didn't stay like the rest of the fellows. They wanted to gamble.

F: Was it pretty popular? Did a lot of guys go down to the casinos?

G: Oh, yes. It would usually be two truckloads all the time. Each truckload would hold twenty-five or thirty guys. They'd put slats across the back end, you know. The trucks were big. The guys would dress up in their dress uniform and go downtown.

F: How did the townspeople get along with the CCC boys?

G: Good. Very good. They liked us.

F: Did they?

G: As a matter of fact, we even played their high school.

F: In football?

G: Football. Here's our team. (Laughter).

F: That's the first I've heard of that. I've heard of games between other camps, but I've never heard of one playing a local high school.

G: They furnished us their old uniforms and their head-gear.

F: Oh, they did like you!

G: Yeah. We got along swell--real good with them.

F: Did they ever organize anything you were invited to or vice versa? Did you ever have any entertainment at the camp that they could come to?

G: No. Nothing like that.

F: Did you have any entertainment at the camp?

G: No. Nothing.

F: You had athletic teams, though?

G: Just the football team and the baseball team.

F: Did you mention boxing too?

G: Mike Burskovich was taking up boxing, and we had the gloves; but there was nobody that was interested in boxing except Mike.

F: Okay. How did the boys get along with the girls of Ely? I don't mean the professional women of Ely. I mean, was there. . . .

G: I don't know. I didn't stick around long enough to find out.

F: Okay. But in general, the rapport between the camp and the town was good.

G: Good, real good.

F: You were thinking of re-enrolling before you decided to come home. Did a lot of guys re-enroll?

G: A lot of guys probably got the same notice that I got, "Hey, they're starting to hire back home. Come on back. If you're going to get a job, now's the time to start."

F: Your mom told you this, or was there some in your family?

G: Yeah, my mother wrote and said, "It looks like things are starting to pick up here, so what do you want to do?"

F: Your other brother that quit school, did he consider joining the three Cs at all?

G: John went into the three Cs in Ohio, here. He went to the southern part of Ohio. I don't know what camp he was in, or where he went, or wherever.

F: Did he stay more than six months or just the same as. . . .

G: I think it was six months for him too, but he left way after I did.

F: You said a couple of times that it was the best six months of your life.

G: It was.

F: Why?

G: It was an experience that I'll never forget. It taught me how to fend for myself and how to live if I had to be alone. It taught me how to wash my own clothes. It taught me a little more in baking. It taught me to respect my elders, such as the lieutenant and the sergeant. I made a lot of friends. It was an experience that I don't think I would have ever gotten if it wasn't for the three Cs.

F: Was it an adventure?

G: It certainly was.

F: You were a little older, though, at twenty-one; but still had you traveled far before this?

G: No. That was it. I never left home until that day. That was the first time that I left home--going to the three Cs.

F: Was it a little bit like going out to the Old West?

G: Yeah, a little bit. (Laughter). As a matter of fact, we went into some of the ghost towns. (Laughter).

F: Did you?

G: Now, this is between me and you (pointing to a picture). I'll show you. There was a ghost town. It was deserted. I can't tell you where it was at, because I don't remember. That was 1939. I assume that it was a post office. I'm not sure, but we went in there, and everybody started picking up letters. This is what I picked up (showing letter). Take a look at the date on that.

F: [It's from] 1903, 1905?

G: There's a letter inside. I think they're both in Italian.

F: Yeah, they are.

G: I had one guy that knows Italian read it to me, but I couldn't make heads or tails of them. (Laughter).

F: Do you think it made you grow up?

G: It certainly did. It made a man out of me.

F: I was going to say. . . . Would it be too strong a statement to say that you went there as a boy and came home a man?

G: No. I would say it made a man out of me. I have to give Franklin Roosevelt a lot of credit.

F: When they talk about the three Cs, people that write on it, say that it did three things. It got people off relief.

G: Right.

F: And the third thing they say is [that] it gave a lot of needed conservation work done that had been neglected for a long time.

G: That's the biggest thing.

F: It got the people involved, you guys, an increased sense of self esteem and self-confidence.

G: You got it right on the head.

F: Would you agree with that?

G: It took these young kids off the street that probably would have wind up like the kids are doing today. They don't have nothing to do. It helped our parents by us going and sending home that little bit of money. Well, \$25 then was quite a bit of money. It really helped my mother.

F: Do you think collectively. . . . When you came home, did you have more self confidence?

G: Right, right.

F: That's the argument they usually put down for all of this. Do you think you notice that change in everybody else there, too?

G: Right.

F: Okay.

G: I think everybody that went out there came back a changed man. I'm hoping that something like that starts again for these kids on the street. I would hope and pray that they do this again for these kids that are out of school.

F: Okay, that's interesting. Several people have brought that up. Do you think with the difference in this country between 1939 and 1991 that it could still work?

G: Sure. There's still a lot of work that has to be done.

F: Well, that's true enough.

G: These kids that are out on the street now that can't find jobs, this will be the greatest thing in the world for them. It was for me.

F: They have the camp in North Jackson, Ohio where they go there for the day and then go home at night.

G: [That's] nothing like the old CCC.

F: Do you think it's important to live together as a group and not go home?

G: Yeah, I think so, but they're so close to home here [that] they can't compare the three Cs of today with the three Cs of the 1939s and the early 1940s.

F: The Director of the Civilian Conservation Corps once said, "The boys that left the three Cs were 85 percent ready for the military."

G: Correct.

F: You would agree with that?

G: Right.

F: Do you think it helped you when you went into the Navy?

G: Right. It certainly did.

F: How?

G: They were going to issue us guns when the clouds started to get dark over there.

F: When you were at camp?

G: Yes, when we were at camp, because every time we'd see a truck come up the road, we'd say, "Here comes our guns."

F: Really?

G: Well, it wasn't guns. It was supplies. It taught me how to defend myself in case I had to go into combat. It taught me to look after myself. It taught me discipline, how to take orders, how to be a good friend with your buddy in the bunk next to you. We were all good friends. I don't think there was an enemy in camp.

F: When you went to the Navy, were there other CCC boys there?

G: I couldn't tell you that. I don't know for sure if there was or not.

F: You'd think it would come up though, if you were in and you were talking with. . . .

G: Probably, if I would have said, "Are there any CCC boys here?" Probably, somebody would have said, "Yeah. I'm a CCC boy." But, it was never brought up.

F: Okay. You came home then, it would have been December of 1939 or something like that.

G: I came home on December 12, 1939.

F: Okay. Then, you found a job when you got home?

G: I got home, and I went to work for WPA for a few months.

F: Doing what?

G: Works Progress Administration. [I was] building roads.

F: Where at?

G: Here in Girard. Being that I was the oldest in the family, and I was accepted as the head of the family to support my mother, I had no trouble getting in.

F: How did you find the job with the WPA?

G: I went to apply at the Girard City Building. At that time, they had an administrator there, so I went in and asked [them], "You know, I need a job. I have a mother and four brothers to support." Right then and there I filled out an application. First thing you know, a couple weeks later, it says report to work. So, our first job was right down here in Girard, building Stambaugh Street. Then, I went to work there. I worked a few months there, and then, I got a notice that I had to go to Warren Harding High School from ten at night to six in the morning. They were going to teach me to be a machinist. I said, "I don't want to be a machinist; I just want a job." But, they were going to pay \$26 every two weeks. That's what they were paying.

F: Is that what WPA paid?

G: That's what WPA was paying. [It was] \$26 every two weeks. So, I had to do it or I was out of a job. So,

the first night I went to Warren Harding. I caught the bus here and went to Warren Harding High School. I went into the class and told them who I was. They said, "Yes. We got you on the list here." So, they gave me my instructions on what they wanted me to do and everything. I said, "Okay. Show me the lathe and everything. [Show me] the tools I am going to use and everything." That was the first day, and the second day [was] the same thing. The third day that I went up there, I got word that they were hiring at GF. I asked one of the guys, "Boy, I'd like to get to GF (General Fireproofing). I hear they're hiring." He says, "Well, what's it cost you for a bus?" I says, "Two tickets." He says, "You give me the two tickets, and I'll take you up there." I said, "Okay." I give him the two bus tickets. He dropped me off at General Fireproofing, and I went in and asked for a job. They took my application and everything. They said, "Come back tomorrow morning. You're hired." The next morning, I came back with lunch and everything. I said, "I'm reporting for work." They said, "Who told you that?" I said, "Well, you did." He said, "I never told you that." I said, "Yes. You did." He said, "No, we'll call you." I said, "Okay." I'm walking out, and I have my discharge papers in my back pocket with the brown envelope from the three Cs. The guy says, "Hey, what do you have in your back pocket?" I said, "My discharge papers." He says, "From where?" I says, "From the three Cs." He says, "Let me see it." So, I showed him the discharge paper. He read it. He read the back. He read the excellent discharge I had and everything. He says, "You ready to go to work?" I said, "Yeah." He said, "Okay, come on with me."

F: The three Cs paperwork got you your first job. That was at General Fireproofing?

G: Yeah. February 5, 1941.

F: You were there forty years, directly from your three Cs paperwork.

G: Yeah. When he read this recommendation.

F: Let me read it. (Reads.) "An efficient and dependable worker. Camp conduct, good. . . ." He read your evaluation.

G: Yeah. Then, he read this. Oh, this was my company commander.

F: (Reading.) "The barer of this note, Frank DelGenio, has been in my service for a period of six months. During this time, he has proven himself to be very efficient, conscientious, and a trustworthy worker. He

has been a baker the whole time he has been here. He has two years experience as a baker at the time he enrolled in the Civilian Conservation Corps. During the short time he has been enrolled with me, he has advanced himself from enrollee to assistant leader. I believe you will find him [to be] a very good asset to your establishment. Alfred B. Trosfer, Commander, #2532." I was going to ask you if the three Cs helped you in your later life. I guess it did. I guess it opened the door for you, didn't it?

G: It certainly did.

F: Did you ask him to write that letter, or did he do that on his own?

G: He approached me. He said, "I suppose you're going to be getting a job when you leave." I said, "Yeah, if you could help." He says, "You want me to write you a letter of recommendation?" I said, "It would help." The day before I left, he gave me this letter.

F: Okay. You went to work at General Fireproofing in 1941. Were you drafted?

G: I worked until the war broke out. We converted to aircraft . . . General Fireproofing.

F: What kind of aircraft?

G: We were making P-39s, fighter bomber parts, thunderbolt parts, ?aileron?, and so forth for these fighter planes. One day, I got a letter. It says, "Greetings. You have been selected to report for duty." So, I came to work the next day. I said, "Boss, I'm leaving." He said, "When are you going?" I said, "Here it is." He read it, and he said, "Okay." A couple of days later, he came out, and he says, "You're not leaving." I said, "How so?" He said, "I got you a deferment. We need you here." I said, "Okay. Thank you."

At the end of the six months, I got another letter. It said, "Greetings. You have been selected. . . ." so forth and so forth; and I again showed it to my boss. He said, "Okay. We'll see what we can do about it." A couple of days later, he came back and said, "I got you another six months." "Fine. Not that I don't want to go in, but. . . ." He says, "We're sending you to Buffalo, New York . . . you and a couple of other guys. We're going to make the P-63, King Cobra fighter plane, and we need somebody to go up there to see what it's all about. So, we're sending you and a couple other guys." So, a couple days later, I was shipped to Buffalo, N.Y. at the Bell Aircraft Plant, and there I stayed six weeks.

F: You weren't going to make the whole plane there, were you?

G: Just the fuselage.

F: Okay. You were going up to learn that?

G: Yes. So, we went up there and got what we had to learn. After six weeks, we come back. We started instructing our people here at the Fireproof. So by that time, my second six months had gone by, and again, I got the letter. Again, I sent it to the boss, and again he says, "I need you Frank, so I'm going to try again." So, I got another six months. So, we started putting out these fuselages. Six a day, we were putting out.

F: How many shifts?

G: Two shifts. Then, we went on a third shift. We were putting out eighteen. We started going eighteen, nineteen, twenty; and we started putting out something like twenty-five fuselages a day. As a matter of fact, the other assemblies. . . . After we'd get them out of the fixtures, we send them down to this other floor. They had to do something to them. They couldn't keep up. So, again, the six months came up, and I got the letter again. This time they refused. (Laughter). They said, "You're going in." The boss says, "Frank, I tried." I said, "No. That's alright. Eighteen months, that was good. It's time for me to go in," because people were starting to call me 4F! (Laughter). I was married and had two kids at the time.

F: Okay.

G: So, in May of 1944, they took me down here at the Girard Station. [They took] me and about two hundred others, I guess; and we got on a train. We went to Cleveland. In Cleveland, we got some clothes, and we were shipped to the Great Lakes. So, I took my boot camp training there and came home for a leave. From there, I went back to Great Lakes in the outgoing unit. I waited there until about two months when I got an assignment.

I went to cook school. I wanted to get into aircraft. I said, "How about aircraft?" They said, "No. We're all filled there. What did you do on the outside?" I said, "I was a cook." [They said,] "You're going to be a cook." I said, "I don't want to be a cook. I was a baker." He said, "You're going to be a cook." So, I went to Pensacola, Florida--they shipped me to Pensa-

cola, Florida. I was there four months, learning how to cook. We were supposed to get an assignment after finishing cook school. They interviewed me, and they said, "Where do you want to go?" I said, "Submarine duty." I don't know why I picked submarine duty, but they said, "We're all filled. What's your next one?" I said, "How about PT boats?" "Okay. There's a squadron just being formed at the Brooklyn Navy Yard in New York. We'll send you there."

So, I packed my bags and that's where I went, the Brooklyn Navy Yard. I waited there four or five months until our boats were ready, and then our boats came in. [There were] twelve to a squadron. My boat number was 5-7-9. I was the cook. I had eleven men and three officers that I had to cook for. We finally left Brooklyn and we headed south. We went to Florida. That was where we were going to be loaded on transports. We were going to go overseas. So, we trained down there for four or five months or something like that. Every night, we'd go out until two or three o'clock in the morning; and I had to make sure the guys had coffee in the morning. I was getting seasick. We had a second lieutenant that hated me. I couldn't figure out why he hated me, until one day I asked one of the guys who knew him well. I said, "What is it with him? Why doesn't he like me?" He said, "You're Italian." I said, "What's that got to do with it?" He said, "Well, he was over there in Anzeio, Italy when they invaded Anzeio. I guess, he went into town one day, and some of the Italians ganged up on him and really gave him a good beating. Ever since that day, he's hated Italians." So, like I said, he had it in for me.

So, one day, the guys wanted spaghetti for supper. I said, "Okay." I went to the storeroom. At that time, we had an APO address, so that nobody knew where I was at. My family didn't know. They didn't know I was in Florida; they thought I was overseas. So, I went in and got the necessary things to make spaghetti like meat balls and so forth. I made them spaghetti, and almost everybody had two helpings. I was taught when I went to school [to] make sure you always had enough food. Never run short when you're feeding a bunch of guys. So, I had a little bit left over. What I had left over, I said, "Does anybody want anymore?" They said, "No, Cookie. We had enough." So, I took what was left over and went to the garbage can. Now, the garbage can was half filled with garbage, and I threw the left over spaghetti into the garbage can. When you looked in that garbage can, it looked like it was half filled with spaghetti.

Well, this lieutenant went in and looked in the garbage can. He saw the spaghetti and called the commanding officer of the base, and I was paged. I had to go up to see what they wanted. They said, "Did you have spaghetti for supper?" I said, "Yes, sir." They said, "Did you have any left over?" I said, "Yes, sir." They said, "Where'd you throw it?" I said, "In that garbage can?" He said, "Is this where you threw it?" I said, "Yes, sir." He said, "Why in the world did you cook so much spaghetti?" I said, "Sir, that's not all spaghetti." He said, "There it is." I said, "Sir, that's not all spaghetti. Look." I went in there and I brushed away the little bit of spaghetti that was on top, and you could see the rest of it was all other garbage. I said, "Sir, does that look like it's all spaghetti in there?" He said, "Oh, my God. No. Who reported this?" The officer said, "I did." [The commander] said, "Okay. All right, as you were." So, I went back to what I was doing. First chance I got to catch him alone, I approached him, and I said, "You turned me in for that spaghetti." He said, "Yes, I did." I said, "Well, we're going overseas pretty soon." He said, "Yes." I said, "One of us ain't coming back, and it ain't going to be me." So, I don't know, to this day, if it was because I was supposed to go back to the hospital and get checked out, or whether it was because this guy was afraid that I was going overseas and that he wasn't going to come back; but a week later another cook come in. He says, "Where's PT 5-7-9?" I said, "Right there." He said, "Can you tell me where the cook's at?" I said, "Right here. Who are you?" He says, "I'm the replacement." I said, "Replacement?" He said, "Yeah, I came to replace you." I said, "What for?" He says, "I don't know." So, I saw the lieutenant and he says, "We're sending you to the hospital." So I said, "Will I rejoin the outfit?" He said, "We'll check your hospital report on your release."

So, I went to a hospital in Maryland. Oh yeah, there's a big naval hospital there. They checked me out, and they diagnosed me as having chronic seasickness, which wasn't very bad. I said, "Now, where will I go?" They said, "We'll try and get you on an aircraft carrier." I said, "I want to get back my PT squadron." He says, "They're gone. They left."

Well, I hung around about three months in Boston. One day, I came in from town, and there was a note on my bunk that said, "Pack your bags. You're leaving." So, I packed the bags, went downstairs, and there was 180 cooks down there. I said, "Oh my God! Where's all these cooks going?" They put us on the buses, and they took us to the Norfolk Navy Base. We got on this big APA transport. "Where we going?" Nobody knew. So, we

had to do duty work. So, my job was to go down into the hole and do some scrubbing or something or other. I went down there and looked into the cargo bay. What I saw! I said, "Oh, my God! Look at what's here." [They were] field kitchens, loaded. [They were] field kitchens were down there.

So, I did what I had to do and I came back up. I told some of the guys, "Do you know what's down there?" They said, "No." I says, "There's all field kitchens down there." They said, "Why?" I said, "I haven't the slightest idea." [Remember, there was] 180 cooks now--field kitchens? So, we passed through the canal, and we were something like 400 miles from the States. We finally found out where we were going. We were going to Pearl Harbor, and we're going to assemble there. Then, we're going to invade Japan. We were going to be the second wave in after the first wave to set up field kitchens to cook hot food. I never prayed so hard in my life."

Well, the next day, we heard something like the atomic bomb was dropped. "What's the atomic bomb?" Nobody knew what it was. The next order we got was, "Turn that ship around and head for the nearest U.S. port. The Japs had surrendered. (Laughter) That was it. So, I spent another six months down there in Shoemaker, California. They froze me, because I was a cook. I couldn't get out, so I had to wait until most of the guys had gone home. Then, whenever my turn came up. . . . So, that's what happened.

F: Then, you came back to General Fireproofing?

G: Then, I came back and waited a couple of days. Then, I went back to General Fireproofing.

F: Which you retired from in 1981, and you got that job through a recommendation by CCC commander. So, the CCCs, you said, helped you when you went to the Navy?

G: They did?

F: It helped you get the job that you ended up spending the rest of your life in?

G: It did. It was a great help to me?

F: So, it was a good six months.

G: I said it was the greatest six months of my life.

F: I see that. Thanks for sharing that with us, Frank.

G: Thank you.

END OF INTERVIEW