

YOUNGSTOWN STATE UNIVERSITY

ORAL HISTORY PROGRAM

Civilian Conservation Corps

Personal Experience

O. H. 1311

JAMES H. ALLEN

Interviewed

by

Bridgett Williams

on

March 9, 1990

JAMES H. ALLEN

James H. Allen was born on October 26, 1923 in Dover, Ohio. He remembers the Great Depression as a terrible time in which no one could find employment. His family was hit with hard times, as was every family. After one year of high school, he decided that he had to find employment to bolster the family income. After a few odd jobs, he joined the Civilian Conservation Corps. His six-month hitch proved to be the last offered by the CCC--U.S. entrance into World War II meant that all available manpower had to be focused on defeating Germany and Japan.

Because of the late date of his entry into the CCC, Mr. Allen had a rather atypical experience. His work consisted of traveling from camp to camp taking inventory of goods, categorizing and boxing up the surplus clothing, tools, and utensils. He traveled throughout the West, but spent much of his time at Camp Missoula. He strongly feels that the CCC gave him a good opportunity to mature and advocates the return of the body as a solution to many of today's social problems. His recollections of the specifics of camp life were blurred because he moved several times within the six-month period, but he often illustrated and enhanced his memories by using books which he had saved from his time in the Corps.

Less than a year after his term in the CCC's expired, Allen joined the Army. He enlisted in January 1943 and was discharged in December 1945. In the intervening time, he saw action throughout the Pacific and was part of the "Island Hop." A case

of medals attest to his expert marksmanship and his valor under fire. He seemed uncomfortable speaking of his deeds during the War, but that too is in the character of a man unaccustomed to talking about himself. He was within 100 yards of journalist Ernie Pyle when Pyle was killed by a Japanese sniper--his account, delivered in short, unsentimental phrases, speak volumes about what it was like to be on the front line.

After he left the Army, he married his wife Dorothy and had five children. He found outdoor work to be his liking, and sought employment as a construction worker. The post-war construction boom in Youngstown kept the work flow constant. He joined the International Brotherhood of Operating Engineers in 1967, and only recently retired. In construction work there are always good and lean years, but he is proud of his good standing within the union and of his commitment to the union through thick and thin.

Mr. Allen's interview is notable for its impressionistic comparative approach. Often, subjects such as discipline, tasks, and leisure activities are discussed both from the CCC point of view and as an Army man. For this reason, I feel the interview will be useful for those seeking to draw parallels between the military-style camp of the CCC and the later quick mobilization of the U.S. Armed Forces.

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INTERVIEWEE: JAMES H. ALLEN

INTERVIEWER: Bridgett Williams

SUBJECT: CCC, US Army, World War II, unionization

DATE: March 9, 1990

W: This is an interview with James H. Allen for the Youngstown State University Oral History Program, on the Civilian Conservation Corps, by Bridgett Williams, at 22 West Avondale, on March 9, 1990.

What we usually do is we usually start thinking backwards and talk a little bit about your childhood, a little bit about your early recollections, some about school. Things that you remember from the Depression.

A: It was rough. Nobody was working. Not too many of them anyway. You just found what work you could get from delivering newspapers, gathering up junk. I worked on a farm for awhile, summertime because that didn't pay much. I worked all summer for \$5 and my room and board.

W: That is unbelievable!

A: Hey, that was better than starving.

W: Right.

A: Then my brother, he was in the Civilian Conservation Corps, and he was telling me what a good deal it was. That was in January 1942, I went in. I got out in July of 1942. That was the best thing that ever happened to, I would say, all the kids at that time. They had

something like that for them to go to.

W: Did you go with some buddies?

A: No, I went all by myself. I was a loner. You might as well say I went by myself. Same way when I went in the Army. I was by myself when I went.

W: I get the feeling some of these guys talked themselves into, "Oh come on, come on." Everybody moved in together.

A: There was a lot of them went that way. This was getting towards the end of it anyway. They were phasing everything out when I went. I went down to Rockbridge there, Hocking County. Worked in the forest down there, woods, clearing off. They sent me to Priest River, Idaho. That was the same thing there, clearing the forest out. Then they sent me to Fort George Wright, in Washington, by Spokane. I was working in a warehouse there and they sent me to Missoula, Montana. I was working in a warehouse there. They was sorting all the clothes.

W: Yes, closing down.

A: Closing it down. I don't know what they did with all of that stuff when they closed it down. Some of it was like practically new. They probably just threw it away.

W: Right. Probably wound up in some surplus store anyhow.

A: That was the best time of my life I think, up until that time, CCC (Civilian Conservation Corps).

W: What did your parents think about going to the CCC?

A: They agreed with me. They said, "At least you will be served three meals a day and a bed every night. You make a little money." We were getting more when I went in than what the Army was getting. We were getting \$30 a month and they were only getting \$21. Of course, they only give us \$5 and the rest they sent home for the family. That helped them out and helped me out. It was really a good experience.

W: What induction center did you go to for your conditioning?

A: Well I had to go down to Cadiz, Ohio. They sent me from there. . . I got examined in Cadiz and they made me a peanut butter and jelly sandwich and shipped me down there to Rockbridge there by Hocking County.

W: Without so much as a howdy do.

A: No. I always remember that peanut butter and jelly sandwich. Well, there was two of them, two sandwiches. I ate them, I didn't throw them away or nothing.

W: May not have been what you wanted but it was something. So, when you were in Rockbridge what was the camp like? What did it look like, how big was it?

A: Well, I don't know. There was probably 200 boys down there. What they did down there . . . You probably heard the Old Man's Cave and all that.

W: Right. Little Hocking?

A: Yes. That is beautiful country down there. We was down there clearing all the dead brush out. They did a lot of other work down there too. They made paths up through the woods there, and they built a block house. I think it is still there, all made out of stone. They cut it all out of stone.

W: Sheet rock?

A: Made it part of the park down there. We all had something in common. We were all poor. That is something we had in common, all of us.

W: Were did they draw the people from? Was it just from the Youngstown area?

A: No, see I lived in Dover when I went.

W: Okay.

A: They had boys there from West Virginia and Kentucky. They just take them . . . Wherever they needed somebody, they sent them. That is like when they sent me out to Priest River, Idaho there.

W: Did the kids from the different states get along pretty well?

A: Oh yes. They all buddied up. You get that many people together there is always going to be somebody arguing or something.

W: But no real discipline problems in the Cave?

A: No. Some of them they kind of stubborn. They get out of it after awhile. Either that or they went over the hill. I only knew two, all the time I was in, that went over the hill.

W: They just send them back if they weren't getting along?

A: No, when they go over the hill they just forget about them, that's all. They are on their own when they do that. They find their own way home. There was very little thievery going on because they handled that themselves, the boys in the camp.

W: Beat the hell out of somebody.

A: Yes. They run through the gauntlet naked and then when they opened the door and he run out, they would throw his clothes out, and he put them on, and he never came back. There wasn't too much of that. Most of them, they took care of their own.

W: They just run them through the barracks, let you take a shot at them?

A: Yes. That was a good lesson for everybody. I really enjoyed it because I saw things there that I would never be able to see any other time or any other way.

W: How did you travel out to Priest River?

A: Train.

W: And did you get to stop in between?

A: Oh, they stop over but not to long. You didn't get off the train and stay for a day or two no where. You didn't have that kind of lay over.

W: Oh, because one guy had a lay over and when you were mentioning the salary disparity he said that the guys in the Army just couldn't stand them. Gave them the worst food they ever had in their life. Any thing that was bad they gave the Civilian Conservation Corps boys.

A: When I was there at Fort Missoula and Fort George Wright in Washington, we ate with the Army. Fort George Wright in Washington was an air base. They eat good, the air corps did. They always did eat. The same way as in Fort Missoula, they eat good there too. That fort that I was in, in Montana, Fort Missoula, they had some of them Japanese internees there.

W: Really.

A: Yes, and they were treated real good. They had guards up and that but they weren't abused or anything. In fact, I think that saved a lot of their lives when they sent them. Because all them come from the coast areas, like California and that. There was an awful lot of service men there. If you were a Japanese, you were

just next to dead that is all. I think that saved a lot of their lives when they took and gathered them up and sent them to those camps.

W: What sort of facilities did they have them in?

A: They had them in barracks, just like Army barracks. They were clean.

W: Did they have any provisions for blocking stuff off so that you could have a family life? Or did they separate the men and the women out?

A: No. I didn't get right into where they were at. We had our own barracks and that was separate. They were treated good. They were prisoners, you can't take that away from them, but they weren't abused or anything.

W: Plenty to eat and a roof over their heads, which was, I guess at the time, more than a lot of the world had.

A: Yes. That is beautiful country up there.

W: What did Priest River look like when you got there?

A: You mean the town or the camp?

W: The camp.

A: All forest.

W: What sort of trees?

A: Pine trees.

W: Everything in Idaho is Pine.

A: Mountains and forests. You could go out to work in the morning and be up on the mountains there and the clouds would be down below you. You could look down on top of the clouds. You were up there that high in the mountains. It is cold. Then around 10:00 it would look kind of foggy and then the clouds would be going up.

W: What were your duties there? The typical day that you were. . .

A: Clearing out brush. That was the main thing I think, clear a lot of that brush out so that new growth could come up.

W: Did you have to checker board the stuff off so that you could burn out for the new growth?

A: They probably did but I didn't get into any of that

mapping or anything. They burnt the old brush. Of course you cut, you know, a fire ring around it so it wouldn't spread.

W: How wide was the fire ring? How much of the safety distance did they think so the fire wouldn't jump?

A: They had fifty feet around it cleared off anyway. They didn't allow to build a man made fire, because they weren't pushing the guys to build it up big like a bonfire. You got hot but they had their leaders and assistant leaders there to make sure it didn't get out of control.

W: Were the leaders civilians?

A: No, they were like a sergeant in the Army. The assistant leader, he was like a corporal in the Army. They had civilian supervisors and they worked for the state or some way with the government. The real commanders, they were Army men. They had quite a few of them that just got out of OCS and that was good training for them. They put them at the head of the camps.

W: Gave them a little bit while they were seasoning up people, I think.

A: It was good teaching for them too.

W: They were a bunch of knot heads. What sort of facilities did they have at the camp for feeding all of you guys?

A: They had mess hall, just like the Army. You had to take your turn on KP (kitchen police). You had guard duty. It wasn't as big as the Army but they had their mess halls and you had your duty at KP.

W: Did they use KP as punishment?

A: No, you can't do that. Everybody took their turn on KP.

W: When you were disciplined what were some of the common things that you could get called out for?

A: You mean for punishment?

W: Yes, well if you messed up. What were some of the things that were against the rules?

A: Oh, they didn't bother to much. If they got down on you they would send you out to clean the grease trap, that was from the mess hall, that grease being a trap and you had to clean that up every so often. That was

about the dirtiest job I think they had. Everybody hated that.

W: Even worse than cleaning latrines.

A: Yes, they knew where they were going if they messed up. They would be cleaning the grease trap out.

W: Was there a lot of competitiveness between the barracks?

A: No.

W: No?

A: They had their sports, they played ball and that. There was no rivalry if that is what you mean. No, they got along good.

W: You were mentioning that there was a town. Is the town also called Priest River?

A: Yes.

W: What did that look like at the time?

A: That was just about like some of these old towns that you see in the western movies. They still had their wooden sidewalks there.

W: Really?

A: And they had the wooden lamp posts. That was up in the mountains there too. It wasn't a very big town. I think they had one theater there and a couple of bars. Of course, you could be out there at night walking down through the woods there at night and see a light. You would get up to it and it was be just an old building. It was a bar.

W: Just somebody put it way out in the middle of nowhere.

A: I guess they did business there. Had a lot of lumber-jacks out there in Idaho.

W: Did the boys and the town people get along alright?

A: Oh yes. Of course some of them, the citizens out there, had hard feelings towards them. As a whole they got along good with everybody.

W: Boys get along good with the town girls?

A: Yes. I think that was a lot of the hard feelings.

W: That is what I thought. People get mad because you are steeling their thunder.

A: I had a map in one of my books of Fort Missoula. That was that beautiful fort out there. They had the buildings all painted white and they had the red tile roofs on them.

W: That is nice! I notice there is a big parameter around here where all the buildings are, the two "U" shaped buildings and then several off. What did you use? The two mains are the barracks.

A: They have got one of them here that is marked off for the CCC barracks they had.

W: So when you moved out of Priest River about when did you move out?

A: I was only out there about five weeks in Priest River and then we went . . . The ones they sent us up to Washington there. Here is where it is. This is where the Japanese, these barracks here. See, that was in the main fort section and we were kind of isolated like, our barracks.

W: Keep you guys that were earning a lot of money somewhere else.

A: Yes. There is a map in here somewhere that showed the CCC barracks. The old CCC quarters, number 4 right there.

W: Boy, they really kept you. . .

A: This here is all the. . .

W: Way on the other side. Well, they kept you close to the warehouse. Was this warehouse were you were working?

A: Well, we had a laundry there, laundry and the warehouses. See, this is a museum building. They didn't have that when I was out there.

W: That the Bitterroot river?

A: Yes. We used to walk down along the river there and go swimming, watch those beavers in there cutting their trees down.

W: Any fishing?

A: I guess there was fishing in there but we didn't do any. That's fascinating, to watch those beavers. If they hear you coming they would take their tails and

slap it on the water. You could hear that like a gun shot.

W: Then all of them dived down and around. So, when you were working. . . I would have never thought that M-I-S-S-O-U-L-A would be pronounced Missoula. That is really neat. The warehousing and the sorting out that you were doing did they tell you why they were doing it or did you know at the time?

A: Well, we knew they were getting ready to close up because the war was just started and everybody was going into the service.

W: Figured you would be needed elsewhere?

A: Yes. I would say it started up again. Get some of these kids off the streets and give them something to do, something productive for the country. They need it bad now.

W: I think so now.

A: I've heard people say, "Well, they can't afford." I can't see that we can afford not to. Because this country is dying.

W: Yes, between if we can't afford to educate them, and we can't afford to keep them off the street, and we can't afford to keep them off drugs, what can we afford?

A: CCC would be a whole lot cheaper than sending them to prison. What does it cost to send somebody to prison for a year, something like \$20,000 a year?

W: Yes. They are sitting on their butt waiting to do mischief again. Really something. When you got out of the CCC, did you come back to Dover?

A: Yes, and I got a job at Timken Roller Bearing Company in Canton. I went there about five months and then I went in the Army.

W: Some of the guys said that they were told by their draft boards to wait around but they went immediately, and said, "No, got to get the branch that I want." What made you choose the Army?

A: When I came back there was something matter. They weren't taking anymore volunteers. I said, "How about sending me my draft papers then?" "Maybe we can do that." So I okayed. So they sent them and they took me in the Army. I registered for the draft when I was out in Montana. They took about a dozen of us downtown

and registered for the draft. That was the ones that hadn't already registered or the ones that were eighteen and hadn't registered yet.

W: Where were you stationed when you were in the Army?

A: I went to camp Grand Illinois and then I went to Fort Lewis, Washington. From there I went over into the Pacific.

W: Seems like a lot of people from around here winded up in the Pacific. I talked to two guys from the 7th Fleet yesterday.

A: I have two brothers that were in the Navy and they were over in the Pacific. I can remember more about CCC than I can the Army. Unless somebody gets talking and then it comes back to me. I can remember only the good things in the Army. I had a lot of good times in the Army.

W: In CCC, what were the jobs that everybody, you know gravy jobs, that you tried to get assigned to?

A: There weren't too many gravy jobs that you tried to. Some of them got to working in the office, typist and they had their clerks. Same as any other company they got their office crew. Most of us were real happy to get out in the woods and goof off out there.

W: You are not supposed to say that. You are hard working.

A: We did our share of work though. You can still see the results of it when you go around to some of these parks. A lot of them took a lot of pride in their work.

W: Well, there were a lot of things to be done at the time. You got a huge park system, you had to have people taking care of it.

A: Yes, you can still go around and see what they did.

W: Were there any real characters in your camps?

A: Oh, you always had them.

W: What kind of things were you getting into. I bet you were one of them.

A: They were always clowning around, doing something. They would be swinging on the rafters in the barracks after the lights went out. You always had some musician there with a guitar or fiddle or something. They played and sang.

W: Did they have an official combo or just guys sitting around on the steps of the barrack?

A: Mostly just sitting around on the steps or on their cots there. I think some camps did have like regular bands and orchestras and that.

W: One guy was talking about trips that they took to town. When you went to town did you go all in a group?

A: Well, they would run what they called rec trips in. Whoever wanted to go to town they would have their trucks there and they would take you into town and you would jump off. If you wanted to go to a movie or wherever you wanted to go. You went and they had like a parking lot or a meeting place where the trucks would pick you up at a certain time. Then, you would have to go back.

W: What if you missed a truck?

A: Well, you hitchhiked back or walked back.

W: How far was it back to the camp?

A: Oh, I don't know. I would say twenty miles anyway from camp to town.

W: Did they call you out for being late, missing bed check, if you ended up having to walk up?

A: Yes, you had to answer roll call. See, where I was in Fort Missoula there, you could walk to town. It was maybe a twenty minute walk or something like that.

M: How was your free time organized? Did they have things for you to do?

A: Some of them in free time they went to school. Some of them learned how to read and write when they were in the CCC. They did. They actually learned how to read and write.

W: That is another thing we need the CCC for.

A: They had their schooling. They had classes. Then, anybody who wanted to go to church on Sunday they would have several trucks taking them to whichever church you wanted to go to. They would take you. There weren't too many of them went to church on Sunday. They usually just loafed around on Sundays if they stayed in the camp area.

I wasn't what you would call real educated. I never

knew of anybody that couldn't read or write. That surprised me when they said they were going to school to learn how to read and write. Even when I got in the Army there was a couple that couldn't sign their own name yet.

W: Had to make an "X".

A: On payday they signed their "X" and somebody would witness it. I thought that was kind of odd that somebody couldn't read or write.

W: When you went into the Army had they upped the salaries?

A: Yes. I think it was \$50 a month. When I went in that was in January 1943.

W: So, they hadn't taken a pay cut. Joining the Army and getting shot at.

A: No. I don't know what it is now. Something like \$500 a month nowadays. Did anybody give you a calendar?

W: No.

A: Before I forget it, it is right there.

W: You got the young boy with his shovel. These are everywhere. They have the shovels but it sounds like you were using more of an axe. Did you have to clear the trees or just the underbrush, the scrub?

A: It more or less was dead folds and that--treated, and died, and fell down. You had to cut that up and drag it up to the fire. Any dead brush you cut that out. Anything that was growing too thick. We cleaned that out a little bit so that the new growth would grow up through it. A lot of it had been burnt out in forest fires.

W: They called you "Roosevelt's Tree Army." When you said that the new growth. . . Did you end up planting the new growth or was it just. . .

A: No, I didn't get into that but there was an awful lot of it going on out there. They planted millions of trees in the CCC, millions of them. That is probably what they are harvesting today, some of it. Some of it has probably burned out in these last few years these forest fires that they had. That was something else that they did, fighting forest fires. I got on one little one. Boy that is hot.

W: Did they have safety procedures there, telling you how?

A: You had a crew, maybe six men, and you had a leader for that crew and he was responsible for that many men. You couldn't have too many or you would lose them. The water boy, that was one of the worst ones. Because everybody was thirsty and you had to run with that bucket and the dipper to give them a drink when he hollered.

W: You were running all the time. What sort of things did they give you to fight the fire with?

A: You had shovels and axes. Brush hogs they called them.

W: Which were what?

A: Well, they had a big long blade on it for just cutting brush. The axes were used for cutting trees where they had saws. Today they use chain saws to zip them down.

W: I was talking to somebody that had. . . When they were fighting forest fires he said the fire would jump from tree to tree over you.

A: That is what they call a crown fire. They will travel sixty miles an hour, get a little breeze going. You can't keep ahead of it.

W: You can't outrun it. What do you do in a case like that?

A: Pray.

W: Run.

A: See, when they had those crown fires the tops of them burned and then all of those needles and that dropping down on the ground, that catches on fire.

W: It is amazing.

A: They started that smoke jumpers school out there in Missoula. That is in paratroopers.

W: Right.

A: That is where they started that school that was out there at Missoula.

W: So that they could go in and parachute in, fight. I was going to ask you some more about your Army life. You said you were in the Pacific in 1943, 1945. Did you do the island hops or who were you under?

A: 77th Division. When I first went over we went to Hono

lulu and then we went to the Marshall Islands. We were in the 37th Division there. Then we went back to Honolulu and we joined up with the 77th Division. We were on Guam, Leyte, Manus Island, the Kerama Retto, and the last one I was on was Ie Shima. That was right next to Okinawa. That is when Ernie Pyle got killed on Ie Shima.

W: Right. I was just reading Brave Men the other day. It is a good book. That was a breeding camp. I didn't know until the end of the book that he would end up dying. And here I am, I'm cheering for him all the way thinking he is going to make it. He has only got a couple more months to go.

A: I was maybe a hundred feet from him when he got hit. He was in a jeep and Japs opened fire on him. They jumped out and into a ditch. Instead of him staying down he stuck his head up, and that is when he got it.

W: That is all it wrote. That is something else. There was a lot of unavoidable things that happened then. From the impression that I get from talking to people, is they feel that the camaraderie and things that they learned from the Army--even though it was a horrible, scary time, people shooting at you, you shooting at other people--had to be done.

A: That is the difference between killing and murdering. A lot of people can't see the difference but there is. Ernie Pyle got killed on April 18. It is funny how you can remember dates like that. I can't even remember by kids' birthdays.

W: Well, he was an important figure. What did they. . .

A: See, he was over in Europe for a long time. Then, just before the war was over he went to the Pacific there. He said that this was his last one. And it was. He didn't mean it that way but he was going to retire or something.

W: Right, go back home. Well, at that point, I think that everybody knew that it was a matter of time, that the war was going to end, and we were going to win. Was there any particular thing that you can point to as saying, "Yes, I know. It is a matter of time now. We are going to go home."

A: No, because we were all packed up, ready to go to Japan. Historians say that Japan would have never been invaded at that time of the year, because they had typhoon. When we were supposed to go there that is when they had the typhoon. They said if we were out there in the ocean, all the ships would have been sunk.

See Japan has never been invaded, never has. China tried it and that is what happened to them. They hit a typhoon season. They lost all their ships, all their men. That is over a hundred years ago when China tried it. Japan has never been invaded.

W: But they were prepared to pack you up and try it anyhow?

A: Well, you never know when those typhoons are going to come. They have their seasons but you can't pinpoint right to the day. But the date that they were supposed to invade Japan is when it hit. All those ships would have been out there. They would have been gone. We were on Ie Shima when that typhoon hit. That wind was going something like 140 miles an hour--rain. You could pretty near drown out it in.

W: Couldn't breathe for sucking the rain. When you land on an island did they have ship to ground cover fire for you?

A: Yes, most of them. They had all those ships out there, the cruisers. That was shelling it. Then they had the Air Corps. Those carriers, they would be in there bombing. The infantry always went in first and then they would bring artillery in. Those islands, you couldn't use the big artillery. You could use the 105s. That was about the biggest you could use.

W: How big were the islands?

A: Forty miles long would be a big one.

W: So you couldn't get something too long range or you would shoot over them.

A: Even in 105s I've seen them shooting point blank, just like you would aim a rifle. That is getting close.

W: Once you were on the island, then what happened?

A: Well. . .

W: You would shoot at people, get shot at! Don't be dumb.

A: I was in the medics. I was a combat medic. Japan didn't recognize the Geneva Conference. We carried guns just like the infantry. We didn't have no cross on our helmets or arm bands or nothing. We looked just like the infantry.

W: Did you know a guy named Tom Callahan? Okay, he was. . . My uncle was also a Pacific Combat Medic in the infantry. So, I always like to check on whether

people know each other.

A: No. I didn't know him. That was worse than the infantry I think. Somebody get hit, you had to go there or the infantry they could stay down a little bit, but you had to go get him. I had a buddy that got the medal of honor at Okinawa. I stayed on Ie Shima and they sent him over to Okinawa and he got the medal of honor. That is a funny thing too.

W: It makes you mad when the people who actually earned them get ignored and don't get awarded them and then the people that didn't earn them are stepping right up to claim that they did.

A: Maybe I shouldn't have done it, but I did it anyway. The way it happened, they had a parade or something down in Youngstown there and he was in it. He got interviews and that. People say, "Well, he never talked too much about it." Which I can understand it. None of them do. Then I got this book here and I'm looking for his name in there and it isn't there. So, I wrote him a letter and asked him, telling him I can't find any record of him. Did he miss it or something? And they checked up. Here is the letter they wrote back to me.

W: Okay. So he was not a medal of honor recipient.

A: This is a very reliable book. I wrote to ask them about another one. I couldn't find it in another book I got and they said, "Yes, he did get the medal of honor but he earned it over in Germany, when he was over in Germany, and they didn't give it to him until he was in Okinawa."

This Doss here, I met his brother. He was in the Navy. His ship came in there one day we were down in the beach. He was asking me what outfit and all that. I told him and he said, "Do you know Desmond Doss?" And I said, "You mean the preacher?" He said, "Is that what they call him now?" I said, "Yes, he is a preacher. He is very religious." He said, "Well, I'm his brother and you wouldn't have known him when he was home. He was a drunk. He was fighting all the time, tearing stuff up. You call him Preacher?" "Yes." We were on Leyte then. After we left Leyte then we went to Ie Shima and then he went to Okinawa. That is where he got his medal of honor. He was a conscientious objector.

W: Yes, for religious reasons.

A: That surprised me. I couldn't believe that was his brother. He said he used to be going out and drinking, getting drunk, fighting all the time, tearing stuff up.

It was his brother.

W: Maybe fear of the Lord got him.

A: In fact, we asked him how much time he had and we can take you up to him. He said, "Well, he got a pass to come in and see his brother." He jumped on the truck and we took him up there. They were sure glad to see each other.

W: There wasn't a lot after the Seliman brothers. They didn't allow brothers. . . Did they do that with the Army too?

A: I think so. After that they wouldn't let. . . Well, we had two brothers that were in our outfit. There were two brothers. So evidently they didn't. . .

W: They didn't enforce it to strictly anyhow. With the medical techniques, how much medical training did you receive as a combat medic?

A: Very little. Well, all the time I was in the States here they tried to teach us something. You don't learn anything at home. Very little you learn. You got to get right out there. Then, it comes back to you what you should have learned.

W: What you wish you were looking at in the book now, instead of sitting on the field screaming at you. What sort of things did they issue you to take with you out on the field?

A: Well, you had a medical bag. It had morphine in it. That is another thing. You had morphine. You had bandages. It was just like a big first aid kit. You had to improvise a lot. If somebody had a broken leg you had to use his rifle to put a splint on it. When we were going to Okinawa there I seen what our ship got hit. They called me to help. I was giving some sailor a shot of morphine. Some Navy officer asked me what commission I had. "I'm a PFC. What do you mean commission?" "You can't give morphine."

W: The hell I can't.

A: That is exactly what I told him. So, he wanted to know who my company commander was and I told him. He said to one of his students to get the colonel and he came down and wanted to know what the problem was. He said, "This is an enlisted man here giving morphine." He said, "Yes." "He can't do that." "This man giving more people morphine than what you will ever see wounded," he said, "let him alone." They didn't get along to good, the Army and Navy.

When we were on Leyte we loaded up then and went clear around the other side of the island and landed on the other side, a little town they called Ormoc. That was on December 7. General Bruce said, "This is a Christmas present to the United States." We were getting off. . . The Navy told our General, he says, "Hurry up and unload. We are getting out of here." Bruce said, "I want all these boats to stay right where they are at." The Navy said, "Take casualties back, we are getting out of here." "You turn around and start taking off, I'm going to turn all of our artillery on you." He would have done it too.

W: Who was this?

A: General Bruce. He was the division commander. He was a mean. . . I guess you would say that he was mean. He was right up there with the men. Of course, he had to be in the headquarters too.

W: You didn't get the feeling that you were fighting for. . .

A: He wasn't like Patton and Macarthur.

W: May be why he didn't get the glory that Patton and Macarthur got. Just a working stiff in a uniform. When you had the Army on the Navy ships, transferring over, were there fights between?

A: Not too much, no. The Navy knew their job and they knew what we had to do. They said they wouldn't be in the Army for nothing. Most of them they said, "No, we wouldn't be in the Army for nothing." They like the Navy and that is what they went into.

W: Did they make a lot of fun of you for being in the Army?

A: No.

W: I bet you made a lot of fun of them about their uniforms.

A: That was something else. When we got a leave in San Francisco to go overseas, they wanted me to carry some officers' bags up for them. I refused to do it. Some way or another I got KP every day I was on a ship. I was on a lot of days. When we came home, I was sitting out in the harbor there in California and the guys started laughing, having a good joke on me. "Well, your KP days are over. I said, "I'm sorry to hear that. You guys eating all this Army C-ration garbage all the time we were on the boat. I was eating with

the Navy guys. I was eating better than the officers were."

W: Got one on you!

A: No, I didn't mind that KP everyday. The way it happened, I was on one day and the next. The cook said, "Wasn't you here yesterday?" I said, "Yes." He said, "How come you are here today?" "Punishment." He said, "What for?" I told him I wouldn't carry the officers bags up on the boat. He said, "I've got a good job for you. You just walk around here and act like you are busy. Make sure you are here at chow time." We had fresh eggs and potatoes for breakfast, fresh meat. I never told anybody until they started laughing at me.

W: They were probably wondering why you weren't the only guy that was leaning out and all the rest of them were starving to death. How hard was it to get fresh supplies?

A: For the Army?

W: Yes. Well, how were the supply lines?

A: I can't remember ever getting it. Everything came out of cans. Some of them, they were fed good. The Seabees were fed good. The Marines were fed good. Of course in combat they weren't fed any different than anybody else.

W: What were the Marines' jobs? What was the difference between regular infantry and being a Marine?

A: Not too much in combat. Wasn't too much. In fact, that division that I was in--the 77th--was the only Army division that could get along with Marines.

W: Because you were bigger than they were, meaner?

A: No, no, because they had a lot of respect for the 77th Division. We were on Guam there. . . Well, you got that history book. It is quoted right in there. It was all old men, the 77th, it was all twenty-eight, thirty years old. That is old for infantry. Marines, they had all seventeen, eighteen year old kids. Got on Guam there and they were watching the infantry. They said, "Look at them old bastards go." They were really proud to serve with the 77th. Of course, they had trouble too.

W: Guam got pretty hot I guess. What was the heaviest fire that you got?

A: Oh, I can't remember now.

W: It is all pretty heavy when it is coming at your head.

A: Yes.

W: There are so many war stories that people have, and so many that they just would rather not tell.

A: Everybody has got their own story. Every individual that was there, they got their own stories.

W: Do you still keep up with your buddies?

A: No, I'm sorry I haven't. In fact, I just lost one here in November. When I came to Youngstown to work, I was only up here doing maintenance work on gas stations for different gas companies. I was putting a lift in down here on Oak Hill Avenue Shell Station down there. Some customer come in and got gas and he got it on a credit card. I kept looking at him. I asked the dealer, "Did you know that guy who just got gas?" He said, "Yes." I said, "Was his name Leech?" He said, "Yes, you know him?" I said, "Yes, I was in the Army with him." He said, "Why didn't you say something to him?" I said, "Well, I wasn't sure it was him." He said, "His dad runs the furnace shop down here on Market Street by the bridge." So, I went down to see him. We met each other a few times after that. Here in November he died. I went to the funeral home. I couldn't go to the funeral because my daughter was getting married again. Same guy she married the first time.

W: You know, a lot of people do that.

A: I don't know whether I had anything to do with that or not. I never interfered with any of my kids problems. If I could help them, I would. If they had problems I didn't interfere with them. I think that was one main factor they went back together again. I didn't interfere and I wouldn't let the wife interfere. "That is there problem."

W: Let them work it out.

A: They got a divorce and they were divorced about a year and they started seeing each other again and talking. They got things worked out. They decided to get married again. They are living down in Tennessee now.

W: A lot of people have done that.

A: Him and her both are doing good. They built a new home down there. So, they must be doing pretty good. He never said what the home costs or nothing but I imagine close to \$100,000.

W: It is a nice one then.

A: Any of them will cost you in that area.

W: I keep forgetting. My parents bought their house for \$14,000, big enough for me and my brother and all the cats and dogs we could drag in. How did you come to join the union here?

A: I got caught working one day. I was running the back hoe and they told me that I would either have to join the union or they were going to put pickets on the job.

W: When was this?

A: That was 1967. That is when work was good back then. They gave me a choice. I either join the union or they were going to put pickets up. The oil companies, they don't want no pickets up on their job. That hurts their business. So, I got in the union. I'm glad I did. I felt better about. . . I had always felt guilty about working, not belong to the union.

W: With Youngstown being kind of a union town, is there a heavy reaction against scab labor in the town?

A: They can't do to much anymore because the government has got so many different laws about it now. It used to be, you either belong to the union or you didn't work, that is all.

W: Well, that was pretty black and white. Did the jobs have any problem with the Affirmative Action that came in?

A: No.

W: Because about every guy that I know has gotten taken off of at least on job. Let somebody else have a chance to work.

A: See now they got an apprenticeship school for the operators. They have four white men, four black men, four other minority men--that is Hispanic and the Indians--and four women. The law says you have to give the women and the minorities first choice on the job. So, those four white men going into apprenticeship, you might as well save. . .

W: Save their money and their time.

A: Quit wasting their time unless everything was gone. They got to call out a minority and if they are all out working then they have got to go to another union, like

eighteen, send one in from there. That is the government. That stinks.

W: They don't do anybody to eighteen a favor by making them drive all the way out to Youngstown and lose their own employment. The way that works. . .

A: That stinks. If I'm not mistaken I thought there was, had someone laid the time on that, and then we were going to do away with it.

W: Well, the Supreme Court took a dent in affirmative action a couple of months ago. They said that most of those . . . The laws are too far one way. They are not fair because they tried to hard to be fair that they ended up giving unfair advantages to women and minorities over white males.

A: I know a couple of women out there that has operated. I wouldn't have no problem working with them anywhere, on any job. They are good. They are just as good as--I won't say any man--but most of the men.

W: If you were in a position of hiring somebody and you hadn't worked with those women would you say, "What the heck, give them a try." If you wouldn't have been made.

A: If they qualify, yes. I wouldn't have no problem with that.

W: Dad said, "Absolutely no broads on the job."

A: Well yes, I did feel that way when they first started coming in. I don't want to work under some woman on the crane or something. No way.

W: Break a nail and she drops . . .

A: I would today. The two of them out there I know now I would.

W: In the union, when you first joined, were there any women in your union.

A: No.

W: How many would you guess are in there now?

A: I would say ten or twelve that I know of.

W: I don't think the trade is doing too well in Youngstown now?

A: No.

W: That is a pretty big jump for an industry that is not really going full out.

A: See, a lot of these union contractors they started up another business, another name. They still own the other the company and they are hiring non-union help. That hurts the union when they do that.

W: What do you think happened to your union? Just too much government?

A: That is it. The union used to be strong here.

W: How much influence did the Pat-Co, when they fired all the air traffic controllers and Reagan supported it, when that happened what was the reaction in your union?

A: They didn't like it and to this day I can't see any other reason for all these accidents they are having on account of that.

W: I think so to. I think they were probably penny wise. What, they were asking for a \$.17 an hour raise?

A: Reagan was supposed to have been a union man. Now, he was the head of the actors' guild.

W: That ain't a real union.

A: Out in California, but he was the head of it. And then he pulled a trick like that. He could have shut the airplanes down for a couple of days. The companies would have settled up with them.

W: Well, between that and then you have got some place like Pitson, where they are facing how many millions dollars of fines--the United Mine Workers.

A: They went back. I'm glad they went back to work.

W: Well, they went back but I don't know if they got what they wanted or not.

A: Well, you never do. How long was they out?

W: Eight months, something.

A: That is a lot of money they lost. If they got a \$1 and hour raise it would take a long time to get that eight months wages back.

W: Yes, I was talking to somebody last night who said he was in the Boiler Makers Union, that he remembers going out on strike for weeks for \$.05 an hour. He said it was a principle, you never got your money back.

A: Sometimes you have got to swallow your pride and forget about that principle, but if you have got a wife and kids at home.

W: Yes, I think that the younger that your union is and the more young men and women you have that don't have a lot of people relying on you, the more willing they are to go make a stand. I think as the unions got older, and the union management. . . They are all young people. They are growing up with college business degrees.

A: I have known a lot of good union men, including myself. I was laid off or something and I could get a job doing something else, I would go.

W: Under the table?

A: Yes, and all the rest of them do.

W: And the Hall didn't crack down on you for that?

A: Well, I couldn't go out and run equipment or nothing like that. Say like carpentry work, or a little electrical work, or something like that, I would go do it for it somebody. So, it is whether you are going to feed your family or eat your pride, one of the two.

W: Refrigerator going to get pretty empty on that pride. Overall you like having been in the union?

A: Oh yes, it did a lot of good for a lot of people. You say your dad was in the union?

W: Yes, he is in Eighteen.

A: Well, you know they have done a lot of good for him.

W: Put me through college is one of the things they did. I had union scholarships, had union lot of things. His pension.

A: They had some crew working up Market street up here further. My boss saw them there and he told me, he said, "Jim, check that job out when you are going up there. See if they are union. Let me know." He said he would call the union hall. So, I went up there and got out of the car looking around. I talked to a couple of guys. I went back and told Ray, I said, "You can't turn those guys into the Union Hall. Let the Union Hall catch them." He said, "Why not?" I said, "Did you see those guys up there working? They got holes in their shoes and their clothes are about half torn off of them. They need a job. Let them work."

They are not hurting us any. We got enough work." You got to overlook some things you know.

W: Especially when times are hard, you can't. . . That was the original point of the union was to have men on hard times standing together. There is a lot of things we need to go back to. You were talking about needing to go back to CCC. That is a good idea. Going back to strong unions, that is a good idea.

A: See, I think the CCC would be good again. Have it just like they did it before. They would have to pay them more money today than they did then.

W: According to one guy I was talking to there is a . . . Out on Route 18 there is a working CCC camp. They pay them minimum.

A: That is not a regular CCC camp. Most of those people live around here. They go home at night and that. The greedy people in this country, they have just practically ruined all the soil and the woods, forest, the rivers. I don't know whether you look at it or not. This ain't a safe place to live anymore.

W: Oh, I know. Take a look at my key chain. I live on the east side of Cleveland. I would eight to ten of these keys are for my house.

A: You got a lot of problems. They say for every key you have got a problem.

W: I got a lot of problems living in an inner city neighborhood.

A: Now the black guy lives over here next to me. He is one of the nicest neighbors I would ever want to live beside. He will say "hi" to me, "How you doing?" That is about the extent of it. He is not noisy.

W: Doesn't mess in your business?

A: No.

W: Exactly what you need in a neighbor. There has been a lot of shifting. How old is this neighborhood do you figure?

A: I would say most of it is sixty, seventy years old.

W: Now you came here when?

A: 1977, I bought this house.

W: Have you noticed a lot of change with the composition

of the neighborhood?

A: Oh yes. There was an older couple living in this house when I moved in. Then they sold out, moved up on South Avenue somewhere. They wanted to get out further. Just trying to think. I don't think there was any black families living here at all in 1977. There might have been one family down towards Hillman street there. Now I would say there are probably eight or ten families living there. They don't bother me any.

W: You are retired?

A: Yes.

W: And what do you do for. . . I notice that everybody I talk to has things that keep them busy. You are still active in the VFW, you have got the CCC.

A: Well, I haven't been going to any meetings because the wife she has been bad for the last sixteen, eighteen months. Last year she was in the hospital six times. She has been in once already this year. She got hepatitis some where and that affected her liver.

W: That is holding her stomach. Is it still bothering her?

A: When they told me she had a bad liver, well she don't drink. He said, "Well, that don't make any difference." A lot of people think you got bad liver it is caused from drinking. He said, "No."

W: Hard to tell your relatives that though. They all think . . .

A: My relatives know she don't drink. Well around Christmas, New Years, she would have maybe a drink sitting around the table here. We used to go out, she would drink a pop all night long. I couldn't see that.

W: Going to be out, drink.

A: Yes.

W: Well, there seems you got a lot of things to do and nice house, good family.

A: I got a lot of work to do. I have been letting mine go. I take care of her and do the housework. That is not my work though, I would rather be outside working in the yard, or in the garage there doing something.

W: Do you putter out in the garage?

A: Yes, if I got the time. But I hate to leave her you know. She feel down the steps yesterday. She should-n't have been upstairs but she went up and she got down to the second or third step and fell.

W: It is hard.

A: I don't want to tell her she can't do this and do that. If she feels like she can do it, I let her do it.

W: Tell me before you are going to do it.

A: I can't leave her. We used to go to quite a few of those CCC meetings whenever we could. She enjoyed it. I told you about her saying that she never saw so many old people in such good shape all in one place at the same time.

W: That is true. The liveliest bunch of people I have ever seen, as far as they all got things to do. Trying to find time to interview them when they will slow down enough to let you interview them. It is hard. They are all travelling and they are all going to this meeting and that reunion and this conference.

A: I have never been to any of the national reunions.

W: There is one coming up in July they keep talking about. There is an Ohio.

A: That is Ohio. I have been to a couple of them. This is the nationals down in Tennessee in September.

W: Well maybe if your wife gets to feeling better then you can visit your son-in-law and your daughter. Go down and pal around for a little while. That would be nice.

A: Today is the first that she has been out all week. She went out last Saturday. Had her hair done last Saturday at noon. Today is the first she has been out since then.

W: She looks good as far as her hair. She looks like she just got it done today. Very nice.

END OF INTERVIEW