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George Wood  
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Oral History Collection

Mr. George Wood

Interviewer: Charlene O. Galyon

Place of Interview: Denton, Texas

Date: November 7, 1973

Ms. Galyon: This is Charlene Galyon interviewing Mr. George Wood on his recollections as an officer of the Civilian Conservation Corps (CCC) during the Roosevelt administration. The interview is taking place at Mr. Wood's home at 2409 Sherwood, Denton, Texas, on November 7, 1973.

Mr. Wood, would you begin by giving me a brief biographical sketch of your life up to the time you went into the CCC?

Mr. Wood: Well, Miss Galyon, that can be kind of long, but I'll make it short.

Ms. Galyon: Okay.

Mr. Wood: I'm George Wood, with the U. S. Department of Agriculture Soil Conservation Service, in Denton. I was born in Bryan, Texas, in 1913. I went to school in Texas and Oklahoma, finishing what was Oklahoma A & M, now Oklahoma State, in 1935. That year was a year in the depression, and jobs were scarce. I was fortunate enough to secure a job with what was then one of the

New Deal agencies, the Soil Erosion Service, Department of the Interior, as a student trainee. Later, in that same year, it would change to the Department of Agriculture, and I was made a full time employee.

Galyon: Mr. Wood, could you give me a description of what the depression was like in your area, how it effected the community, the area in general?

Wood: Well, generally, the depression was characterized by bread lines, soup lines, people out of work, banks closing, stores going broke, and the country in financial trouble. Our problem, primarily, was that we had people without jobs and no hope of jobs. This led to a period of time when the government had to step in and do something in some manner to help people get through the period where they could just live, not make a living, but just live.

Galyon: Just make it.

Wood: You may not remember the day the banks closed, but one of the first things President Roosevelt did when he came to office was declare a bank holiday, and all the banks closed. I can remember if you didn't have some pretty good credit in a grocery store, and you didn't have money, well, there wasn't hardly anything that you could do. But that was the type of

period we're talking about: banks closing, stores going broke, and economic situation almost completely gone, you might say. Of course, it was the people that were affected--people that were living and trying to make a living. People with families were having the problems. Our youngsters today can't understand what a depression is. But if you came home without a job, without food, you'd know in a hurry.

Galyon: So it was a bad time for everybody. How did the depression affect you personally, your family?

Wood: Well, I was fortunate enough to be in school and had a job. I'd worked through school. You might be interested in knowing I was making twenty cents an hour and was happy to have it, and [it] did put me through college. I believe I've stated that I was a student trainee my last year in college. I did have this job when I got out of school. That was more than most of the students could say. In fact, I was drawing \$150 a month, and that was more than my college professor was making (laughter).

Galyon: Could you tell me, since it was a bad time for the people, what the land was like in this area? Was it a time of desolation as far as land went, too?

Wood: Have you read The Grapes of Wrath?

Galyon: Yes.

Wood: That was written during this period, or pertains to this period. Much of the land had been intensive farm land during the war, during the First World War. Now with crops such as nickel cotton and twenty-five cent wheat, it didn't pay to farm it. The people leaving the land and going somewhere, anyplace where they could do something to make a living--just enough to get food to eat and clothes to wear. So our land was being abused; it was not being taken care of. There was no interest in taking care of it because what it could produce they couldn't sell. You're right, this was a period of problem, but a period that, I'm happy to say, as a nation we soon snapped out of it.

Galyon: So the land was in need of help as well as the people.

Wood: Right.

Galyon: Could you tell me how you went from your first position into the CCC position?

Wood: The CCC or Civilian Conservation Corps, of course, was one of the New Deal agencies that was the dream of the administration, of President Roosevelt, which was in some manner or other to give young men something to do. At the same time it would help them and help their families. As I stated, I was employed by the

Soil Conservation Service, Department of Agriculture, at that time, and we were assigned to work with CCC camps. And camps is what we mean; the boys were in camps. Our job was to work with them, to gainfully employ this labor force that was willing to work and needed something to do. We were one of the agencies, one of many, that used the CCC labor in the soil and water conservation of the nation at that time.

Galyon: Could you tell me how long you worked in this particular program? When did you start and how long were you with it?

Wood: I was assigned to the CCC program in July 21, 1935. This was in northern Oklahoma. I was in the Stillwater, Oklahoma, CCC camp. Now from there I moved to Konawa, in central Oklahoma for a short period and then to Blackwell, Oklahoma, which is on the Kansas line, north central Oklahoma on the Kansas line, where I worked until October of 1938. So that is three years with the CCC program as a technician in the technical force of the camp.

Galyon: Could you give me a little detail about what your particular duties were, what you did in your position?

Wood: All right. I was a soil scientist. Now that may not be too familiar to you, but my duty was to develop

soil surveys based on the soil of the land we were working on. In other words, I went out and walked over the land and dug holes and made a map showing the soil, different soils, the soil characteristics. And that map, or that soil's information, was used by other technicians as a basis for developing a soil conservation program on the land with the land owner. It is the foundation of a conservation plan. That was my duty. In doing this, assigned to the CCC program, I lived in the camp, in the officer's quarters. I pretty much took part in the routine of camp activities.

Galyon: Then your job was basic to the conservation program. You did the basic work to see what needed to be done?

Wood: Yes, as a survey party surveys the right-of-way for a highway and determines the topography for the highway, my job was to determine the topography, to determine the basic resource of our soils from which was developed a conservation plan.

Galyon: Did you work out of a central office, or were your headquarters there in the camp or. . .

Wood: Those three years I was actually headquartered in the camp because in each camp there was a technical staff which was a technical headquarters in the camp itself.



It was comprised of the man in charge of technical force, which in those cases was the camp superintendent, a conservationist who developed the plan on the land, and the soil scientist who developed the basic information from which the plan was developed.

Galyon: Did you have someone directly above you, a direct superior to whom you reported?

Wood: Yes, I was responsible to the camp superintendent.

Galyon: You reported to him?

Wood: Yes.

Galyon: Was this, for depression time, a good job? Were you glad to get this job salary-wise?

Wood: Yes, in every respect (laughter). We were glad to have a job, period. And this was a good job. As I said, I was getting \$150 a month. That was more than most of my college professors were making, and it was a good living wage. I was married on this salary, and we paid \$20 a month for a furnished house. How about that?

Galyon: That's a bargain (laughter). Now when you went into your new position with the Civilian Conservation Corps, was your work just a whole lot different than what you'd been doing as a trainee? Was it a whole different area or pretty much what you'd been training in?

Wood: It was in the same area, only in training you are learning how to do it. Now I was actually doing the job and carrying the responsibility that went along with the job.

Galyon: Actually on the job.

Wood: Yes.

Galyon: Did I understand that when you were training you were with the Department of the Interior, but your job with the CCC switched you under the Department of Agriculture?

Wood: I don't believe I made that very plain. I kind of skipped over that. The entire program was shifted from the Department of the Interior to the Department of Agriculture.

Galyon: Oh, I see. The whole program was shifted over.

Wood: Yes.

Galyon: When you went into the CCC organization, how organized was it. Were the departments--I know there was the Labor Department, the Agriculture, Interior, and then the Army or War Department--were the departments pretty sure on what area they had? Was there any overlap or confusion?

Wood: I can recall no confusion or overlap. We didn't have as many agencies in government in those days as we have today. Each field was pretty well defined.

We weren't very close to each other, so we didn't see the other agencies we're talking about very often. They had their field of work; we had ours. And there was no overlap, as you call it, in our responsibilities. But we were working on private land, with land which belonged to private individuals. The Forest Service, U. S. Department of Agriculture, worked on public land, so we had no overlap in that responsibility.

Galyon: Then cooperation was the rule rather than the exception?

Wood: Right, that's right.

Galyon: Then at your level your duties were pretty clear? You pretty much understood what your responsibility was?

Wood: Yes, and we were proud of it. We worked with private land owners. We helped them develop a conservation plan, helped them carry it out, and you could see the results.

Galyon: When you first went into this job, Mr. Wood, did the idea appeal to you? Did you have, oh, an optimistic outlook for the CCC, or did you have your doubts as to how this whole program was going to work out?

Wood: Well, as I recall it, the main thing was that I was real happy to have a job. But the way the job worked out, we were proud of what we were doing. We were doing something that we thought--we knew--was good for the community, good for our country. We could

see the results. We could see that land, our basic resource, was being damaged, being washed away. We could see the results of the program that we were applying--land coming back into use, back into production. And we'd keep our basic resource--our soil, our water, and our plants--in a healthy condition for our nation. You know, the nation without good soil soon goes hungry.

Galyon: Then you were confident in your work.

Wood: Yes.

Galyon: You felt good about it. Could you tell me the specific areas, geographic areas, you worked in in your service?

Wood: Yes, if you're referring primarily to the CCC program.

Galyon: Yes.

Wood: It was in northern and central Oklahoma. The northern Oklahoma area was in good agricultural land, wheat country, highly productive country. But the central part of Oklahoma was in rather poor agricultural areas. So I had experience in both, and in both we could see the same results.

Galyon: Could you tell me what camps were in these areas, what camps you worked with?

Wood: All right. The Stillwater, Oklahoma, camp. Then I moved to Konawa, Oklahoma, which is in central, kind

of central-eastern Oklahoma. And then to Blackwell, Oklahoma, on the northern Kansas line, in wheat country. Of course, there were CCC camps scattered all over the United States, and I guess we'll talk about those as we get into the program.

Galyon: Yes. Could you tell me now something about the specific projects? For example, how were the projects chosen?

Wood: By projects, you mean the work that the boys were doing?

Galyon: Yes.

Wood: In our particular case we developed conservation plans with landowners who were interested. Not every landowner was interested in conservation as we know it today. Fact is, we had a lot of trouble talking some people into letting us run contour lines so they could follow them with their crops, with their row crops. We had trouble talking people into building terraces. So we worked with the people who were interested and wanted to do something. It was selling, a selling job, to start with--to sell a landowner to terrace his farm or crop land, to put in the waterways needed, to build the drop structures, to plant the trees on land where trees should be growing, to plant the pasture grass on land that should be in grass. It was with the people who had a little understanding or a little knowledge of

conservation of our resources, of protecting and conserving the soil, with whom we worked. So we had a selling job to do, and it was those people we could sell that we worked with. That, in a nutshell, is who we worked with. The selection wasn't made by random or by who you voted for or anything else. It was who was interested in this program.

Galyon: You did say that you worked on the private land exclusively.

Wood: Yes, on private land. As in relation to public land, we have very little public land in Texas as we know public land. There's some but nationwide the Soil Conservation Service worked on private land. In the Department of Agriculture, the Forest Service works on public land. The Department of the Interior works on public land. Now the Corps of Engineers and other agencies work on land that they buy, normally, like the reservoir sites and those things.

Galyon: So once a project location was picked, then was it your job to go in and see what needed to be done with the land?

Wood: Yes. It's kind of interesting. As a landowner was interested, or we could sell him on the need for taking care of his land, I would be the first man on

the property. I'd walk over it, digging holes, making a map of the soils. Quite often he'd accompany me, and I always welcomed him because I'd have a chance to explain to him what the soil was, what its use could be, what its capabilities were, and what its limitations were. Even though he had farmed that land for many years, many of them had hardly even dug a hole in it to know what was down there three or four feet. I was the first one on the land, that's right, developing the soil's information to be used by the soil conservationist to develop a plan.

Galyon: Did you have a crew, a whole crew, specifically assigned to you or just a few people to work with?

Wood: In the CCC program, you know, labor was one of the biggest things we had. We had more labor than anything else (laughter). Yes, I'd have one or two of the CCC boys with me, helping me to dig holes and make maps, and we had to measure some distances. Then I had a draftsman in the office that would do the drafting of the map. Now remember that these boys were not trained, so I had to train them. Sometimes they'd change. We'd get a different man, a different boy, and we'd have to train him. So training was a big job, too.

Galyon: A big part of your job. After you finished your duties on the land, then did they go to work on it by what you'd suggested?

Wood: Yes, when the conservation plan was developed with the landowner, then the CCC program provided him the labor to do that work. Remember, we didn't have the big equipment we have now. Now we do everything with equipment. Then, labor was cheap and we did most by hand. The CCC boys, enrollees we'd call them, would help him build terraces, would help build the waterways, would plant the grass, would build fences, would slope gully banks, would plant the grass on them, and plant the trees. In other words, we'd just go to work with the landowner and actually do the work itself for him. That was the program.

Galyon: Was this done at any cost to the farmer? Did he pay part of it? Or was it all just for his benefit and the government paid?

Wood: Normally, he would have to supply the materials. Now this isn't true on all the most costly materials. For example, if there was concrete or masonry work involved, normally, if there was anything that could be produced with CCC labor, they would produce--



like quarry rock. We would furnish concrete, the cement for concrete work. Now the landowner would have to furnish, usually, his team--and often it was horses we're talking about--or tractors, if he had them, and plows. There was some cost to him, but not as we would charge him today. He had most of it done for him.

Galyon: Now the young men in the CCC who worked with you in the CCC, were they willing workers?

Wood: We found the majority of the boys we're talking about, these young men, were willing workers. They were glad to have a job. And they were interested in what they were doing, the majority of them. We always had some exceptions. Yes, we found the typical CCC enrollee to be a good worker.

Galyon: Well, was there a feeling of rapport between the worker and his supervisor, or did they feel like he was, you know, way above them?

Wood: At the time in our nation during the depression, these men came from very poor homes. They were brought up under conditions where they were just thankful to be alive, you might say, to have a living. They resented no one telling them what to do. In fact, that's the way they had lived all their lives, so there was no resentment in the way

of anybody being the boss. There was good relationships. Very close relationships existed between the boys and the bosses, the foremen, and the technicians, the people who worked with them. I believe we might say it was more like teamwork than just a bunch of people and a boss out working.

Galyon: Everybody worked together then. Do you think that the men felt compelled to work, or did they seem relatively happy? Do you really think they were, you know, glad to be doing what they were doing?

Wood: Well, we didn't expect a lot out of them. After all, they were going to be there for a long time, and we weren't in a hurry to get the job done. We didn't have any deadlines, but we did expect them to put in a day's work. Again, remember this wasn't with equipment. Most of this was hand work. So if the boys kept busy, that's about all you could ask for. But the amount of work they did get done was surprising, even though it seemed like they weren't too fast (laughter).

Galyon: But they worked, anyhow. Did you think the work was acceptable? Would you call it good work? Did it suit you?

Wood: Yes, at the time we were, you might say, pioneering some new fields in the way of conservation, developing conservation plans and applying them, and we were doing things to the land that had never been done before. We were seeing it pay off. We were seeing the results. Yes, we felt that we were doing something that was very worthwhile. It was good for the landowner, it was good for the land, it was good for our country. You know, half of your remuneration from a job is personal satisfaction, and we really had it.

Galyon: Did you hear complaints? What did they complain about while they were out there in the field?

Wood: You mean the boys?

Galyon: Yes.

Wood: Well, it's kind of like the Army. If you don't have some gripes, why, there's something wrong. So as long as they were griping about something, everything was all right. But when they stopped griping, you knew something was wrong. Well, they griped about the food. It seemed like some of these food directors. . . by the way, the doctor of the camp was in charge of the food distribution, and we had one for a while who said that during the summer the boys had to have hot food and in the winter

they had to have cold food. Well, that didn't even go over with me (laughter). So those kind of things kind of rubbed them the wrong way. There was always something, but we had very little real trouble.

As far as strikes, or sit-downs, no, never.

Galyon: They didn't think they were overworked? They didn't say, "Oh, you're killing us!"

Wood: No (chuckle), they were from families that. . . if they did work at home, they were working pretty hard.

Galyon: Used to working?

Wood: They were used to working.

Galyon: No big complaints then. If we could, I'd like to talk about actual camp life for a minute. I understand there were several camps in this general area.

Wood: Yes, you may be interested in that there was a camp here at Denton, oh, on the north side of town. It was located. . . well, what is this, the Rancho, the Rancho Theatre? What's the name of this theatre?

Galyon: Yes, the Rancho.

Wood: Somewhere in that vicinity was a CCC camp. I never was there. There was a CCC camp at Bridgeport. There was one in Grapevine. There were numerous camps in Texas. I do not know how many. But these

camps--the camps we were connected with--were located in agricultural areas where there was a soil and water conservation problem on which we could use labor, such as the CCC labor, to treat the land.

Galyon; Would you mind mentioning again the specific camps you were working with, to get it straight?

Wood: I was in Stillwater, Oklahoma, Konawa, Oklahoma, and Blackwell, Oklahoma.

Galyon: Would you think that the camps were like carbon copies? Did they all look just alike?

Wood: Yes, I believe any military installations, you might say, are carbon copies. After all, the military, the Army, did build the camps. It was under their direction. Yes, the camps were all the same type of construction. They were of temporary construction. The barracks were alike. The mess halls were alike. The offices were alike. The storerooms were all alike. Everything was just alike. Now maybe some were setting up east and west and some north and south but it was. . .

Galyon: Very much the same pattern.

Wood: Very much the same pattern. It was cheap construction because it wasn't built to last forever.

Galyon: Could you give me an idea how they were set up? How was the general formation?

Wood: The normal camp consisted of four barracks, about fifty men to a barracks, more or less. They had a mess hall that could feed all the men at one time. One end of the mess hall was partitioned off for officers' mess, in which the officers in charge of the camp and the technical force that lived in the camp would eat. There was the camp office, and the quartermaster area behind the office, in the same building where the supplies were. Then there was a hospital. There was a recreation building. There was a latrine. And then there was the officers' quarters. And that made up the camp.

Galyon: How were they furnished inside--just like spare Army furnishings?

Wood: The boys' quarters in the barracks was a long room, one big long room, with a central aisle with cots on each side. Each boy had a cot, and he had some type of locker in which to keep his possessions and a foot locker at the foot of his bed. Of course, everything was furnished. Everything that he needed was furnished.

Galyon: What about the officers' quarters?

Wood: The officers' quarters were the same type of building, but they had partitioned it into rooms. I lived in the officers' quarters for a couple of years. I had

a small room with a cot, Army cot, a table, a wardrobe, and a chair. It was very comfortable, except in the winter it got awfully cold in the buildings (laughter).

Galyon: Then can you tell me how the organization of the camp was set up?

Wood: Now I said the camp was under the direction of the Army. It was built by the Army, and the entire program for the care of the boys, the enrollees, was in the hands of the Army. Well, the Army officer in charge of the camp usually was a captain in rank. He could be a 1st lieutenant, but normally it was a captain. Under him he had a second officer, which was a lieutenant, either 1st or 2nd lieutenant. Now these were reserve officers. These were not hard-core Army people. Most of these officers had just finished college, had come out of college with a degree, and had taken advanced military training and had come out with an officer's rating. They had been called in by the military for, say, two or three years active duty in the CCC program, so they weren't hard-core Army. And besides these two officers, we had a doctor. Each camp had its own doctor. He was an Army doctor, again, in the Army reserve, being called in for active duty.

They had a civilian employee that was usually called an education director, who was in charge or responsible for the educational program for the boys. They had a library. He carried on regular schooling activities in the camp for the boys. Then the technical force, or the force that used the labor, the Soil Conservation Service, was composed of the camp superintendent, a soil conservationist who worked up the plans on the land, and a soil scientist, which I was. We had four foremen, labor foremen. We usually divided the boys into four groups or four crews. Each had a foreman.

Then we would hire what we called a local experienced man to work along with our technical force. It was a local person who had experience in certain fields that we needed. For instance, in the camp I was in we quarried a lot of rock. Well, we needed someone to handle dynamite because the boys couldn't handle dynamite, so we hired a local experienced man to handle dynamite for us.

Then the camp had trucks. We had a full time mechanic who was responsible for the care of the equipment. We had a full time blacksmith who maintained the hand tools that was used. And, you might say, that was what a camp was made up of.



Galyon: That was quite an organization. Could you tell me just how military was camp life for the young men? I know that these camps have been compared, in some instances, to the German labor camps that were really very Nazi-oriented. Some people worried that our camps were just militarized. Was this exaggerated?

Wood: We had heard some complaints about the military angle of CCC camps by people who were not acquainted with them, but I saw no military training, such as you and I know military training, in CCC camps. The boys did have to stand once a day for retreat, when they took the flag down. That was the only formation that would take place, and that wasn't a military formation. They'd blow the whistle, and all of them would come running and line up. Then they'd take the flag down. But there was no military training. There was no courses in military training. There was no ammunition, no arms, no firearms, that is, and no drill. They were in military uniform because that's what the Army had, and that's what they wore. But the camps I was in, and the camps over the country, were in no way military camps.

Galyon: No feeling of enforced militarism, then?

Wood: No, there was not. Now it is true. . . it's likely some of these people, after the camps went out of the picture, did undergo military training. The Army had learned a lot in the CCC camps that they put into effect when they started military training in. . . when was it, '41, '42?

Galyon: Yes. These camps, then, were pretty much a total environment for the men with food, clothing, shelter. . .

Wood: Self-containing, yes.

Galyon: This environment must have been much different from the one most of the boys came from. Did you see much problem as far as adapting? For example, were there any boys here from the city who hadn't been on the farm ever? Did they have any trouble adapting to this?

Wood: This varied from location to location, again, depending on where the boys were from. They didn't like to transport the boys too far away from their home. They kept them within a certain radius, say, two or three hundred miles away from home as a rule. In our cases, we had boys from the eastern part of the state, boys whose families were on welfare, who were hungry, who really didn't have clothes to wear or food to eat. This was the opportunity they had been

looking for. Here they had something to wear and something to eat. In most cases, they appreciated it.

Galyon: Then most of the young men that came to the camps you were associated with were from the Texas-Oklahoma area? This rule was pretty much followed?

Wood: That's right. Now that wasn't true in all cases. I know of some camps in Arizona where the boys came from New York City. Well, needless to say, they weren't very happy (chuckle).

Galyon: That's a little over 200 miles.

Wood: Especially when they were a hundred miles from town and couldn't get to go to town, and it wasn't much of a town when they got there (laughter).

Galyon: But in your camps, they were pretty much from this area, so it wasn't radically different for them.

Wood: Yes, they were a long ways from home, but they were still in Oklahoma or Texas or whatever it was.

Galyon: Did the boys seem to have a problem adjusting to a life that, well, if it wasn't military, was at least regimented?

Wood: Not as a rule. Because again, these boys were raised. . . they came from homes on welfare where they had worked at what little jobs they could find.

They were used to taking orders. They're used to being told what to do, and most of them could adjust to the regimentation--there had to be some regimentation--just very quickly. Most of them got to where they liked it. Now there's some that couldn't. I don't know what the per cent is, 10 per cent maybe. Boys [who] couldn't. . . after a few days or weeks, they'd go home or leave. I guess you'd expect so many.

Galyon: Homesick?

Wood: Yes, that's true, I guess. Human nature. All of them are not alike.

Galyon: Even though most of them were satisfied, there were some desertions. Like you said, as much as 10 or 11 per cent in some cases. Do you attribute most of these desertions to the homesickness or to the fact that they just didn't like the regimentation?

Wood: I think both and maybe a few other things. Some would get homesick. However, they didn't have much home to go back to, most of them. Some of them didn't like the regimentation. They all had to get up at one time and be in bed at a certain time. Some didn't like to take orders. Some just didn't

like that part of it. Some didn't like the food, some didn't like the people, and some didn't like the climate. The gates were not locked. They could come and go when they wanted to, and there wasn't any military police to go after them. So naturally some of them did walk out.

Galyon: And if they did leave, just without any ceremony, was there a chance that they could come back if they changed their minds? Were they taken back?

Wood: As I recall, if they came back within a certain time, they'd just be AWOL for a few days, and they'd cut their pay that much and just go on like they were. A lot of them did come back. Yes, I know. Now I was acquainted with a few who did leave and did come back.

Galyon: Do you have any idea of what circumstances were like for the men that came to this camp? Do you feel that this was like the last choice for them--to enter the Civilian Conservation Corps?

Wood: I guess we kind of need to go back to who these people were and where they came from. As I recall, to get into a CCC camp, to become an enrollee, you had to be recommended or had to be signed by a welfare worker. You were from a home that was on

relief. You may or may not have had a father. He may or may not have had a job. But he couldn't make a living for his family. The family was in need. They were not supporting themselves as they should to maintain themselves even. So this was an opportunity for this young man to help the family because as a CCC enrollee he drew \$30 a month, of which a share of it he could keep and a share went to the family. So most of them considered this a job which they were doing to help a family that needed the money. And, of course, with him gone from home, they didn't have to feed him, didn't have to clothe him, so it took one mouth away from the table and gave them some money with which to feed the rest of the family. Well, coming from that condition, most of the men that came into the CCC program were glad to be there. They felt that they were doing something to help out at home.

Galyon: These were men from the poorest of circumstances?

Wood: From the very poorest, right.

Galyon: What was the average age of the workers in the camps?

Wood: Well, we had two different camps in age. We had the junior camp in which I would say the average age would be about eighteen, nineteen, twenty, somewhere

in there. Then we had senior camps which mostly were veterans of World War I who were put into CCC camps. And those men were something like forty, forty-five, at that time. Now these camps were segregated in that respect. We didn't have juniors and seniors in the same camp.

Galyon: The older ones and the younger ones were separate then. Now once the boys got to camp and they were integrated into the routine, did they settle in? Did there develop among the boys a feeling of camaraderie?

Wood: Well, there were four barracks, and as you know we had some pretty good ball games between barracks (laughter). Usually the education director was also the athletic director of the camp, and they'd work up some pretty good ball teams in football and basketball and baseball and challenge other camps. Yes, I guess you'd compare it to a high school with a good spirit, kind of a good, loyal spirit to your high school. It was kind of like that. If they had some winning teams, they were proud of them. The boys became close friends, and there was a lot of esprit de corps, let's say, within a camp.

Galyon: Did you see the formation of any gangs, either as, you know, super close friends or as a gang causing trouble?

Wood: Well, for some reason I don't recall groups causing trouble. I think the boys in camps I happened to be associated with were so happy to have a job and something to eat that they didn't want to do anything to upset that boat. They wanted to stay in it.

Galyon: In other words, they were not resentful of authority, then. They took discipline well?

Wood: They took discipline well. They were not resentful of authority. Today this might not be true, but it was then.

Galyon: Do you remember what the feeling was around the camp? Did these young men feel like they were doing a worthwhile job? Did they feel like they were helping themselves, helping their families?

Wood: I doubt if they had a lot of thought in that respect. They did feel they were helping their families. But it was a job. It was something for them to do. As far as the work they were doing on the land, there was a certain per cent, probably a small per cent, say 10-15 per cent, that became very interested in what they were doing. In fact, a number of these



boys went on to college, obtained a degree in some field of agriculture, and are still working in that field today. But I would say for three-fourths of the boys, it was a job which they did. They did what they were told and were glad to do it. But as far as feeling a feeling of accomplishing something, I doubt it.

Galyon: Did you hear much about Roosevelt among the camp? Was he a regular subject of conversation? Did the boys feel like he was doing a good job, or did they care? Were they much interested?

Wood: I would say they didn't care and weren't much interested (chuckle) because they came from homes that weren't interested in politics. They came from homes that were interested in trying to stay alive.

Galyon: Now could we go into a general rundown of an average day in the CCC camp?

Wood: Average day in the CCC camp started with the top sergeant blowing the whistle in each barracks, oh, about five-thirty or six o'clock. I don't remember their exact hours. Breakfast was at six-thirty, and I mean I had to eat breakfast with them, too, if I was eating. They would have sick call after

breakfast. Those who didn't feel well enough to go to work would report to the hospital. We'd always have some goldbricks in that bunch which we'd have to weed out. They reported to the technical area where the technical staff was at eight o'clock. They wouldn't march them down there. They'd walk down there in single file. Our work assignments had already been made. We'd already be on the job, and we had work assignments for each crew. The foreman would load his crew up into his trucks and take off for where they're going to work.

At noon, if they had crews working with a number of boys in a crew, the Army--well, their trucks--would bring food, the lunch, to the boys. In the winter we always liked to have hot food, and in the summer, cold food. But as I said, sometimes the doctor didn't agree with that. But anyway, they would furnish them the lunch in the field. If we had crews who were not composed of enough boys, or like the two boys that was usually working with me, we carried our lunch.

At four o'clock they'd be back in camp, unload, and we would turn the boys back over to the Army. Now this was the time when they would clean up their

barracks, would police the grounds, and would have any recreation activities that was planned. And usually at five-thirty was supper, and they'd all go eat in the mess hall.

After supper there would be planned some educational classes for those that were interested. There would be a loafing period. They could have more games. Usually, there was always a baseball diamond handy, football field, or basketball courts. They could play. They could have organized teams. Or they could go to town, if it was close enough to go to town. They were pretty much on their own until about ten, when lights were out. That was kind of a typical day.

Galyon: How many days a week did they work?

Wood: They worked five days--Monday, Tuesday, Wednesday, Thursday, and Friday.

Galyon: Off on Saturday and Sunday?

Wood: Off on Saturday and Sunday.

Galyon: What about holidays, Christmas and other times?

Wood: Yes, and sometimes they'd make up some holidays (laughter).

Galyon: Well, you said the boys. . .

Wood: Now if the weather was bad--you might be interested in this--the Army had a rule that if the temperature was below forty degrees, they wouldn't bring the boys to us. We didn't get them; they kept them.

Galyon: That was a holiday, too (chuckle).

Wood: That was a holiday. In northern Oklahoma we had lots of days when the temperature was below forty degrees.

Galyon: Now you said the boys complained about the food. What do you say? Was it as bad as they said? Was it just there?

Wood: Well, I ate in the officers' mess. We had the same food the boys did. The only difference was we had somebody to bring it to the table. There they had to get it themselves. But I thought we had good food. I liked it. Of course, I'm not hard to please when it comes to food, but I thought the boys were exceptionally well fed.

Galyon: Plentiful food?

Wood: Plentiful and well-prepared because they had cook schools for the cooks. They had well-trained cooks. They would take boys out of the camp and train them to be cooks. It was well-prepared, good food, well-balanced meals, and all they could eat.

Galyon: Probably more than they were used to.

Wood: More than they'd ever had before.

Galyon: I'd like for a minute to go back to the after hours in the camp. You said they had organized activities like sports. Did they have a special hall set up for recreation?

Wood: Yes, there was one of the buildings called the recreation building, recreation hall. Part of it was the library. By the way, the PX or the post exchange was in that building, where they could get cigarettes and candy and everything, their everyday needs, at minimum prices. Today's prices--well, you can't compare them. Well, anyway, they had reading facilities there, and they had inside game facilities. They could have and often did have parties. They would arrange and have parties out there and invite town people out for parties.

They would have classroom space. The educational director knew the education background of all the boys. That was part of their records. If any boy wanted to go ahead and take some work towards his education, it was available for him to take courses in mathematics or English or history or reading or anything that he was interested in doing.

And we in the technical force conducted courses for them in the technical field that we were in. For instance, I taught a course in agronomy--that's field crops--and in soils. We had engineering courses or clerical work. All that was available to them, and it was usually pretty well-attended.

Galyon: They weren't required to do this. It was just there if they wanted it?

Wood: They were not required, that's right.

Galyon: What kind of a library did you have?

Wood: Well, I'm trying to think. There were some basic books that the Army supplied, which would be primarily the things the boys were interested in or that was popular or was available at that time. In some of the camps there would be a civic club or maybe a women's club that would take it upon themselves to supply some reading matter for the boys--paperbacks, for example. That was always a good project for some civic group or ladies' club. And there were magazines. They were always well-supplied with magazines and the newspapers.

Galyon: As far as the educational opportunities went, could a person have the facilities to finish an education, say, if he hadn't finished high school? Or was there any opportunity for them to get college credit?

Wood: No, there was none that I recall. Merely, it would be a way for someone to, if he hadn't gone through high school, for example, to go ahead and study some of those courses, so when he did have an opportunity to go back to school or to take an examination--in some schools you can take an examination and pass them for a high school diploma--he would be in a better position to take advantage of that opportunity.

Galyon: These courses were all after work hours, weren't they?

Wood: After work hours, yes, that's right.

Galyon: And still you say they were pretty well-attended?

Wood: Pretty well-attended, yes.

Galyon: And the boys took advantage of it?

Wood: Yes. And for those of us who were teaching, it was after work hours, too, but we were glad to do it for them.

Galyon: Then you'd say that the camp was beneficial as far as helping them, as far as training and education, even as much as it was a work agency, a relief agency?

Wood: Remember, this was volunteer. It was strictly up to the boys. But the boys, as a whole, were interested in bettering themselves. In fact, most of them had

no way to go but up, and many of them took real advantage of this opportunity.

Galyon: Well, we know how the boys at the camp felt. How did a community feel to know there was going to be a CCC camp nearby? Were they afraid, sometimes like they are with an Army camp, that they'll have to lock up their daughters, or did they think that local men were going to lose deserved jobs?

Wood: I believe, as a whole, the towns or communities were happy to see the camps come in. For one reason, they brought in a pretty nice payroll that they didn't have before. It brought in some families, both from the technical force and the military, that would be living in town and spending some money in town. These people would become part of the community to some extent. As far as the technical force and the Army, the townspeople were glad to see them. The boys didn't really fraternize much with the townspeople. They would go into town to go to the picture show. The Army usually supplied them transportation for that. We had few instances where a town resented or resisted a CCC camp. Of course, there are exceptions to everything, but in general, the town was glad to see them, glad to have them.



I know of no instances where you might say the boys caused problems for the towns. Now we're dealing in an era of our history where these boys, again, came from homes that were in need. They really didn't want to do anything so that they'd lose this opportunity. They wanted to stay there.

Galyon: Then there were few if any incidents between camp and town?

Wood: Very few. Now there are some exceptions, yes. But in general, as a rule, there were very few problems.

Galyon: Can you think of any exceptions in the camps you were in, or were these incidents in other areas?

Wood: There was one exception in one town we were in where the problem, I think, was more with some of the adult leadership in the camp than with the boys. There had been some unpaid debts by people who moved. That caused problems for some of us who were living there. And the town resented it, and it hadn't built a very good reputation for the camp. We ran into this one place. But this was due not to the CCC program or to the camp, but to some individuals.

Galyon: So the camps as a whole were of benefit to the communities. So if the community reacted well

to getting a camp, how did it feel if it was going to lose one? For example, I know that oh, late '35 or early '36, Roosevelt was thinking strongly on cutting back his budget and in doing so, abolish a number of CCC camps. Did the community hate to see it go?

Wood: I wasn't connected with any camp that was being abolished or moved. But I can imagine that it was very much like any other program that either has to close down or to move or to slow down or something. I'm sure there's people who would. . . who took steps that could be taken to continue it. But in that time, there was probably little they could do, either to continue it or to save it or to prevent it from moving. I can't answer that question direct because I don't have firsthand experience. But I know of one case--only one--where a camp was closed at the end of the program, and the people didn't want to see it go. But they had no choice, for that was closing the program.

Galyon: In most cases, do you feel that the camps at least finished a project they were on before they just disappeared?

Wood: Yes, in camps that were working with the Forest Service on building forest trails or with the Park Service on building park facilities, usually they stayed until they finished the job that they were doing in that particular area. For instance, if they were working in a park, they were building sidewalks and picnic areas and restroom areas and buildings to do with the park and all, and usually those were finished before the camp would move on. They didn't leave something halfway done for the community to have on their hands afterwards, no.

Galyon: It has been said that of all of Roosevelt's alphabet agencies, the Civilian Conservation Corps received the least criticism. Did you find that was true? The general feeling of the country was that the CCC was doing a good job toward helping people, toward helping end the depression?

Wood: I believe it was probably because it was again taking the boys from needy homes and giving them something worthwhile to do that was good for the community. In other words, the projects that the camp carried out were good for the country, good for the community, good for the people in the community. The people knew this, and I believe they were accepted on those grounds. Again, in the time I was in the CCC we heard no real complaints

or no real objections to the CCC program. Everyone thought it was a good program, and it was something that was needed to help the young men, to give them something, to get them off the streets, to get them into something that they could do where it was worthwhile. I believe the comment you made that it was well-accepted by the nation is entirely true every place I was.

Galyon: A good feeling about it then. Still, as well thought of as it was, it's hard to find a government agency that is completely free of politics. Did you see any evidence of political favoritism as far as jobs or appointments?

Wood: As far as appointments, I can't speak for the military because I don't know how they were appointed, except I know that the officers in the camp were reserve officers who had obtained their commission in college and came out and were called into this active duty. In the technical program, the camp superintendent was a political appointee. But all the ones I worked with were well-qualified for their positions. They were the only ones that were political. In my particular case, I was not a civil service employee when I started because it was not under civil service. But within the first year, within 1935 during the first year, we were all placed under civil service and have been under it ever since. So

there's no politics at all. There can't be. If you know the Hatch Act, we can't participate in politics. We're glad it's that way.

So let's say that there was some politics in that the congressmen had something to do with placement of the camp itself. People that wanted a CCC camp in their community would contact their congressman, and he would take what action he could to see if one could be located there. That's very much as some projects are done today, so that's nothing new, nothing wrong with that. Then he would appoint the camp superintendent which would be head of the technical force. Again, everyone I knew were well-qualified.

Galyon: As far as choosing the jobs then, you would say much what you were saying awhile ago, that the land that was worked on was land that was available to be worked on and not particularly picked out because powerful or influential persons owned it.

Wood: I know of none where I was. Now we worked with all people who were interested enough to let us work on their place (chuckle). Again, it was more of a selling job then. In those days, people weren't knocking on your door for this type of assistance. You had to sell them. Maybe we picked the ones with the least sales resistance (chuckle).

No, we found that the most progressive farmers--the men who owned and operated land who were most progressive--were the first ones to ask for our help because they could see the need and could see the benefit to them. So really, we didn't have a problem finding a place to work as I'm saying--or might sound like I'm saying--because a progressive farmer, a progressive farmer or rancher could see this benefit, and he'd come in and ask for our help. We didn't as far as saying, "Eeny, meeny, miny, mo," who gets our help? We helped everybody we could. It didn't make any difference to us whether they were a big farmer or a little farmer or the way they voted or anything else.

Galyon: Well, when you decided on a project and were working with a farmer, did the farmer have a fee to pay, or was it just given to the farmer? Did you charge anything at all to him?

Wood: Now remember, we were looking for places to use manpower, labor. We had lots of labor. So we would do the thing that required labor. For instance, if there was a waterway to build, to grass, if there was hand labor involved, we would supply that labor. If there was a structure to build, we would build it with labor. If there was gullies to slope and grass to plant or trees

to plant, we had the labor. Now if there was considerable cost involved, such as cement for concrete structures, the government would furnish the cement, and we quarried the rock for it or furnished the concrete where it was. So really the farmer, the landowner, his cost was very little over what his normal cost normally would be. He furnished the power, for example, the teams or the tractor or the seed. Often, we would divide the cost on fertilizer, for example. In those days, we didn't use much fertilizer. We applied a lot of lime on land in that particular area because they needed lime for alfalfa and those type of crops. The farmer and the government would divide the cost on that. So it did cost. . . there was some cost to the farmer. But remember, the labor was free.

Galyon: Would you mind reviewing for me a few of the practices that you did for the land? What were some of the things that you did to improve the land?

Wood: Well, let's take, for example, a typical farm that we would work on. We'd develop a conservation plan for a crop land that was to remain in crops, that was going to be row crops, such as cotton or corn or grain sorghum.

If it needed terracing, we would plan for terraces. We did not have the terracing equipment, that is, the machinery. The farmer would have to make arrangements

for the equipment. But we'd do the engineering work. We'd run the terracing lines, we'd stake them out, we'd mark them out for him. He'd build a terrace or have it built. We'd furnish the labor needed for that. Then we'd check it out, be sure everything was running.

If a waterway to take the water from those terraces to lead it to a safe outlet would need to be built, we'd build it with our labor. We had him put the grass in it. So it was in protecting crop land, it'd be terracing, contour farming, waterways to take care of the excess water.

We would plan a crop rotation system with him and use of crop residues to improve his land.

On pasture or areas that needed to be planted to pasture, we would plan with him what type of grass would be adapted to that particular soil, how it should be planted, when it should be planted. He would have this information. He could arrange to have it planted, and if it was manpower involved, we had the labor. Now, of course, it doesn't take a lot of labor to seed some grasses, which he would do. Now he didn't have to make these changes. It was voluntary on his part.

On existing pastures, if there were gullied areas in them where we could build diversions, to divert



water away from the gullies or to slope the banks and plant it to grass, that was part of the plan.

If he needed stock water, you'd build a farm pond. Again, the CCC boys would furnish the labor. We would do the engineering work.

If in this particular area there were some trees that needed. . . some windbreaks to be planted, we had the trees and the labor to plant them. So what in essence it amounted to was developing a conservation plan to treat the land according to its needs and to apply the practices as conservation measures that was needed to protect that land, which is different over the country, but in general it means really using land according to what it's best suited for and treating it according to what its needs are.

Galyon: You just did what needed doing. Going back for a minute to the idea of politics or favoritism, was there any out-and-out fraudulent practices? Were there any fraudulent practices?

Wood: Well, I guess as long as there's people, there's going to be some that want to take advantage of something. Yes, there was a few--very, very few occasions--where somebody misappropriated something or tried to take advantage of their position. I guess that's true in just

about everything. I know particularly of one case where one of the CCC camps in another state, the camp superintendent couldn't resist the opportunity he had in buying gasoline-- we had trucks, had our own gasoline pumps--and instead of accepting all the delivery of gasoline, he just got half of it, and the other half he'd get in gasoline coupons and take a trip on it. I might tell you though that he ended up in Leavenworth.

Galyon: His crime didn't pay (chuckle). Anybody else try that?

Wood: No, I think that was enough of one lesson to be enough. But we were checked real close. There was another case you might be interested in, where an auditor in another state set up a CCC camp on paper and made all the payments, pocketed all the money, and kept it operating. He was caught, and he went to Leavenworth. Then after that, about twice a year, we had an inspector come by to just see if our camp was there (chuckle). I guess he went all over the United States to just go and drive in to see if the camp was there (chuckle). But I guess you can expect that in any type of. . . even in private business people are involved.

Galyon: The national director, Fechner, I understand, had difficulty in placing Negroes in these camps, so much so that he eventually had to just totally segregate the camps and

keep a limited number of black camps. Especially, I remember during 1935, he had a great deal of trouble when he was trying to place black camps in Texas, California, and Arkansas. Were you aware of any of those troubles?

Wood: Not real directly. We were. . . the camps were segregated. The junior camps. . . we had junior white and junior black camps. We had senior camps, senior white and senior black. I worked in. . . Konawa was a junior black camp, all Negro boys. In the Blackwell camp, it was. . . Blackwell and Stillwater both were junior white boys. They were segregated completely. We had no mixing of the races at all, except for our technical and Army force. Now the Army did use some black officers in occasions in their black camps. But that was a few cases, not many.

Galyon: In the black camp you worked with, were there white officers or. . .

Wood: Yes, white officers and white technical force.

Galyon: Did you find any resentment of the black enrollees in the camp against the officers?

Wood: None whatsoever. That was a very interesting assignment. I guess I enjoyed working with those boys more than anything, any place I'd been. Remember, for those boys, this was the first time in their life they'd ever had

enough to eat and clothes to wear that fit them and that they liked to wear. They were happy. They were just. . . they wouldn't do anything that might kick them out of camp. They didn't want to leave. They stayed. They were very happy. They had enough to eat, a good place to sleep, a good place to stay. They were the happiest bunch of kids, you might say, nineteen, twenty-year-old, eighteen, nineteen, twenty youngsters you ever saw.

Galyon: So they were no problem. How did the community feel about having a black camp?

Wood: The community where this particular camp was located was Konawa. There were a few blacks in town, not many in this particular town. There was some in the country. This was not an area in the state where you have a very large black population. The town at first was a little concerned it would be a black camp. But the boys didn't fraternize much in town. They'd go to town to the picture show. The picture show arranged for them to come to the picture show. But there was no trouble. The town did accept it, that there would be black boys in the camp. But they were all located at the edge of town. I don't recall any problems existing because of that.

Galyon: A final point. Back to the Army. Did you have any experiences where you thought that the Army tended to forget the other three departments in these operations? Did they tend to think of the CCC as their own private operation, or do you think this was exaggerated, too, that the Army just really stayed where it should be?

Wood: Really, we had two commands, you might say, or two organizations in the CCC camp we were in--all the camps. The Army did run the camp. It was their camp. They did run it. They had control of the boys until they marched them down and turned them over to us. Then we had control of the boys until we marched them back to them. So most of the time--you see, we had them for just what, seven or eight hours a day, and they had them the rest of the time--we were perfectly willing to let the Army run the camp. That was their business. They had the problems, we didn't. All we had to do was work them. We had no problems that I recall ever with the Army or the military people--you're talking about the officers now, the Army officers--with camp problems because they knew what their job was, and we knew what ours was.

Galyon: Do you happen to remember. . . I understand in some cases that the Army would prohibit certain materials

from the library as too radical. Do you remember any instances about the Army keeping a certain book out because it was dangerous?

Wood: No, I don't. No, I sure don't. I don't recall that at all. We had an education adviser in each camp. That was his responsibility, that part of it.

Galyon: He was not Army?

Wood: No, he was a civilian employed by the Army. I can recall some few cases where, oh, there was some literature that he had removed from the library, but I don't recall why. It was not literature that the Army furnished, but I'm sure it was some things the boys brought in that he thought didn't belong and he would take it out. But again, these boys were accustomed to being told what to do and what they couldn't do. They didn't resent it. We didn't have any strikes or any sit-downs or any refusals to eat or anything like that. They were glad to get what they got.

Galyon: They just took it as a matter of course. When the CCC was phased out in '42, even though you were no longer directly working with it, did you have feelings on the subject? For instance, did you think that it should have gone on, or do you think it had served its purpose and it was time to phase it out?

Wood: I believe it had served its purpose because the nation was over this period of depression. We'd come out of the depression. We knew there was a war coming on. Remember, Pearl Harbor occurred in '41. So it was time to forget the CCC program and get tooled up for war. I believe most of the camps went out before that period. There may have been a few left. But their usefulness--I'll say the purpose for which they were designed--had probably pretty well gone by that time. Again, they were designed to take these youngsters, these boys, from poverty homes, poverty-stricken homes, and give them something to do. Well, the nation had come out of that period pretty well by the 1940's.

Galyon: So you feel they'd done their job?

Wood: Yes, they'd done their job.

Galyon: As a final evaluation then, as far as the American land and the American boys and as far as dealing with the depression, do you think the CCC did a good job?

Wood: I would say yes, absolutely yes. Having been associated with it as close as I had been for three years and living in camp, I believe I can sum it up with this statement. We're talking about people. We're talking about young men. We're talking about our, really our resource, our people, citizens. They would come into CCC camp with a

"hung-dog" attitude. They couldn't stand up straight. They would hold their head down. They wouldn't look you in the eye. Poorly dressed, poorly fed, nowhere to go, nothing to do, no hope, completely downcast, coming into the camp. They would be there a month, would have good food, regular schedule, good clothes, a job to do, money in their pocket. In a month or two time, they'd stand up and look you in the eye as if they were a human being. It put many a young man back on his feet. It gave him some hope in life that he didn't have before. I would say yes, it was 100 per cent effective and successful in that respect.