

Oral History Interview with

JOHN KOCHAN

Saturday, Sept. 25, 1999

At Skyland Conference Hall
66th Reunion of the Shenandoah Chapter
of the
Civilian Conservation Corps

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Original manuscript on deposit at
Shenandoah National Park Archives

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Transcription

JA: Saturday, September 25, 1999. We're at Skyland Conference Hall at Shenandoah National Park, the 66th Annual Reunion of the Shenandoah Chapter of the Civilian Conservation Corps. My name is John Amberson, I'm a volunteer in Shenandoah National Park and I'm here today with John Kochan. How do you pronounce your name sir?

JK: K-O-C-H-A-N, Kochan.

JA: Kochan, Kochan, excuse me, John Kochan. Mr. Kochan, would you state your name and when you enlisted in the CCC?

JK: My name is John Kochan and I enlisted into the CCC camps, 1941. Uh, ...

JA: When did you first hear about the CCC?

JK: When I first heard about it was word of mouth. It went uh, from the older people that first went into the CCC camps, in 1933, and it trickled down to me where I became the last one to get into the CC camps.

JA: Uh huh. And that again was in, what, the date of that, that you went in?

JK: The date, of that? Is uh, 10-27-1941.

JA: Right. And you were living at that time in Pennsylvania, is that correct?

JK: Yes, with my parents.

JA: And uh, these were, this was just before or actually during almost the beginning of the Second World War?

JK: It was the beginning of the second world war, yes because I was in the CC camps at the time when, when they announced Pearl Harbor was invaded.

JA: And what was one of the reasons why you joined the CCC at that time?

JK: Out of necessity, because uh, my parents didn't have the income uh, you know to support themselves and me and the rest of the family.

JA: And how old were you at the time?

JK: When I went in? Uh, I went in when I was 16 years old.

JA: When you left uh there, you went into the service, what was the next place that you went to? You went in for physical conditioning, is that correct.

JK: Well, yes, uh that was at the camp where we had you know uh, our exercises, and you know, training in different uh fields, of uh work. See conditioning means, not in the sense of physical as much, it's that's, it meant that, preparing oneself for the different job works that they had at the camp.

JA: Mm hmm. And what type of conditioning did you go through? What type of preparation did they give you?

JK: Well, forestry work. And uh also driver training, where we learned to drive different vehicles, and uh, that uh, there were numerous other types of training, but in where I started, you know, in like the forestry building, fire, fire trails and clearing deadwood from the forest and things like that.

JA: And then after you were at least a month there in this particular place, and then you went to 4 different places during your enlistment?

JK: Yes. 4 different places. I was in a place called Cedar Run, uh, uh, Pennsylvania. And the Camp number was S-90. And then I went to uh, uh, Camp s-95, La Porte, Pennsylvania. And after that uh, uh, I went to uh, which was forestry. After that I went to uh, Goldsboro, Pennsylvania, uh which was also, what we did there, was, uh, build firing ranges at uh, an army base, at that particular time. I can't remember it as of right now. And also uh, we were sent to uh, Idaho to prepare us to build the Al-Can highway, from United States going through Canada to Alaska, which never developed because World War II was declared for us.

JA: When you went from these, place to place, you whole unit was transferred at one time?

JK: No, individual, individual, wherever I went, I went as an individual. We didn't go in groups. Uh, uh, we went as trainees for whatever work that we, where I went into like was, clearing out in Idaho, clearing blister rust you know, from the trees, to preserve the trees so they wouldn't die. That was one of the projects.

JA: When you went out there, were you the only one chosen to go to that particular place? Or was there many from your camp?

JK: No, I was the only one no matter where I went, I was the only one.

JA: That sounds like a special status you were in, that you were chosen to do this, in these different places.

JK: Well because of the forestry work, and uh our camp leader was actually a civil service person. He was a forest ranger involved in uh, building uh, camp booms on the lake, Priest Lake, to collect logs that were going to the lumber company at that particular time. The trees that we felled were the trees that went to the lumber company.

JA: What is interesting I think, is the fact that you were doing something a little bit different than other CCC men, and they went to one camp as a unit. You went as an individual from place to place.

JK: Yes, because of my ethnic background uh, they felt you know that, and then of course interviewing me, of the type of person that I was. In uh, being sociable, would blend in wherever I went, I talked to anybody and everybody, and you know, because it was all a thing that we had to be, in order to stay together we had to get along together, you know, that kind of thing.

JA: Yes, and your experiences at these different camps at these 4 different places you were working, were they much the same? The camps, were they put together the same way, the uh, was the routine about the same at each of the camps, or was each one different?

JK: Well, they were different because of, like when I was out there in Idaho, they didn't even start the project of the Al-Can highway. Uh, we were in you know, clearing the forest and uh, sending the logs, you know to the lumber, lumber mills. And they, well the lumber, the logs were actually sent down the river or the lake, Priest Lake or Priest River, and uh, the, going to the logging camps. That was the purpose there, but our main purpose was to build the Al-Can highway, which never developed.

JA: When you uh, when you finished up your tour with the CCC, did you go in the military right then?

JK: Uh, when I was discharged, uh, I was actually discharged through the army uh, because the CCC's were abolished, so the army took total control of it when I was discharged. Because I was discharged through, at the uh, Cumberland uh, Cumberland, Pennsylvania, New Cumberland, Pennsylvania, which was an army depot at that time. I think it still is today, but uh.

JA: All and all with your experience in the CCC's did you find that, that it was a worthwhile time in your life?

JK: Definitely, because I learned to get along with people from all walks of life. Uh, and all nationalities. Because in the camps that I was in, there were Jewish people there, Irish, Italian, German. It, you know, they were all nationalities, and it was a wonderful experience for me. Today, I uh, I am the same way as I was then. Uh, I always got along with all the CCC'ers, even today.

JA: That's great.

JK: I uh, I'm quick to apologize. You know, for my rudeness, if it is rude, you know to uh, to carry on a conversation and boast about my CC experiences. If that's rude, then I'm guilty of it.

JA: Listen, thank you so much for stopping by.

JK: Sure.