Matthew Redinger: It’s the 8th. This is the interview with Mr. Burton Appleton. 1987.

Note: During the first ten minutes of the audio, Matthew Redinger discusses potential sources as well as the existing bibliography of his master’s thesis—The Civilian Conservation Corps as a Tool of the National Park Service: The Development of Glacier and Yellowstone National Parks, 1933-1942—with Burton Appleton.

[Interview begins]

Burton Appleton: How do you want to proceed?

MR: I read through my materials and the questions I had from my paper. I went on a lot of what I found there from single sources. I was interested in corroborating, seeing if this was indeed the condition in your case. First I want to get the basics down: you were there from when to when?

BA: I can tell exactly, from a letter. We arrived here April 12, 1939. I wrote a letter home on April 14, two days later. We left...I don’t have that date. We left sometime in March in 1940. For some reason, the correspondence stopped after September 1, 1939. They didn’t save it. I’m sure I wrote after that, but the family hasn’t been able to dig up anything. My tenure there was one year—two hitches as they called it.

MR: You went for both of them?

BA: We were allowed four hitches.

MR: After that you were ineligible?

BA: You had to leave. There were some loopholes. If you received some kind of a job—I don’t know what kind—you might be able to stay longer, but otherwise no. The idea was they didn’t want us to think of that as a permanent way of life.

MR: Right, as a relief effort.

BA: The concept was good. It could offer someone of those tender ages who doesn’t know what the devil he wants to do. He may think he does—or she. This gives him a chance to think things over a little bit. Just on that basis alone. Whether one is instructed in any kind of useful
occupation, that doesn’t enter into my thinking in this at all...for any revival of this kind of program. Absolutely unnecessary. At that age, you get a chance to...it gives them a chance to see what’s what. It helped me in that respect. I can go into that later.

MR: You were at GNP [Glacier National Park] 15 [Civilian Conservation Corps camp number]?

BA: Fifteen. What is there now, they call it the graveyard. I got a plan from the Park Service library. I visited it a few times. They have a big sewage disposal tank. They have equipment for maintaining the roads and the other things in the park.

MR: I have a very, very general map about where they were.

BA: I’ll show you. I have a better map than that, but that may be also in the car.

This map you should be able to get from the library which is where I got it. This will tell you. This looks like a surveyor’s map. There’s Camp 15 at this bend in MacDonald Creek. The creek goes out here which is the entrance to the park checking station. You go up a little ways and you come onto this road. There it is.

You can take this map with the idea that, when you go to the library, you can get one like this. I must have left this out in the sun on the seat of the car. It got a little burned around the edges. That’s how I identified the spot, with this map.

MR: I would like to see it because I’ve not seen any of the old campsites.

BA: You’re not going to find any remnants except this one is an outhouse. I have a picture with the date on there. I just took it, July 12, 1939. I have no recollection of that outhouse. I talked to someone at the lawn party—the superintendent’s lawn party. He said that—what was his name?—the concrete structure for the barracks still remain. I’d have to go out there and look for them. I don’t know where they are. I didn’t see them on my two or three trips out there. That’s where the camp was. We were on a bluff overlooking the creek which wasn’t very far from where the checking station now is.

MR: You were in Company 30...

BA: 3280 was the Army number and the Glacier Park number was 15. GNP 15.

MR: Was that a New Jersey company?

BA: I would say no, though there were fellows from New Jersey. Jersey City. There were kids from Buffalo, New York, New York City, and Upstate New York. There was even one fellow from Delaware, I still remember. It was largely, I would say, from New York City: borough of
Manhattan, borough of Brooklyn. But I would narrow it further. I would say largely from Manhattan.

MR: Was there any kind of inter-city rivalry in the camp? The New York boys stuck together...

BA: As opposed to the upstate? City-country kind of thing? I think there was always some of that. But it didn’t reach the proportions of the marines and the sailors.

MR: Volatile.

BA: Explosive. Violent. There was nothing like that. Good-natured, maybe not so good-natured, ribbing between the country and the city. There may even have been that kind of ribbing between the Bronx and the Brooklyn crowd actually. There were some from the Bronx. There were some from New Jersey. I don’t recall any Pennsylvanians. There were some from as far west as Buffalo, New York. But that’s the extent of the geographic distribution that I recall.

MR: I have a copy of a thesis that was written in Missoula in 1935, I believe, about the first administration of the CCC. He was talking about Missoula—that Missoula was actually terrorized by the New York kids that came. Street vendors had displays outside and they would knock over displays, pocket merchandise, and shoulder Missoulians off sidewalks into the streets. There was quite a bit of theft, an extensive amount of theft. They went out to Fort Missoula and, in one of their tents, they found a tent almost full of stolen merchandise from houses, stores, all that kind of stuff.

BA: Fort Missoula also was the Army headquarters. In fact, this was in what they call the Missoula district. These were CCC boys?

MR: Yes.

BA: (whispers) Awful.

MR: When you were here, did you have a chance to go in to Kalispell?

BA: We went to Kalispell; we went to Whitefish, Columbia Falls, Coram. Morton City I don’t think existed then. I, myself, and the fellows I went in with never got into any altercations with the townspeople. I want to tell you, I don’t remember any. I don’t remember any fights...where anyone got in any fights. I have to tell you for the record, I got drunk for the first time in my life down here in a bar which longer stands. It used to be right down on the other side of the railroad tracks. The owner or manager of this place, Tommy Todsen (?), I told him about this, and I said, “Is it right there?”

He said yes. Well, it’s no longer there. What I’m telling you by that is that some of the older ones evidently did drink a little bit, but most of the camp, we were too young. We were not

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drinkers. We never had any beer out there. I, myself, when I went to town never drank beer. I would say that my colleagues in camp got me drunk. I didn’t get myself drunk. They had to put me in a truck and take me back to the barracks. That was the first time and the last time in one whole year. By that time, I had just turned 18.

I suppose there was some town and camp friction, possibly, like town and gown friction, but I don’t recall it.

MR: Also in that thesis, there was something about the townspeople making sure that all their daughters were inside.

BA: I remember that in the Navy. We used to hear that all the time. That was a couple years later in the Navy. There may have been that. I wouldn’t doubt that at all.

MR: I read—it’s in the paper here somewhere—that you had weekends off, from Friday afternoon to Monday morning.

BA: We didn’t have the whole weekend off. I may correct that. Saturday morning was devoted to the Army. By that was meant we had to clean the barracks. We scrubbed the barracks down every Saturday morning. We policed—that’s the word they used—the camp, picking up papers and tidying up. We did that until noon. After that, the time was our own. Moreover, I have in one of the letters, the lights went out at ten o’clock, but they didn’t care whether we were in bed just so long as we were at work the next morning. In other words, we could have stayed out all night; they didn’t care just so long as we were fit for work the next morning.

MR: I see. I remember reading a couple reminiscences of people saying that in the park library, the supervisors were saying that the enrollees were out too late and up too late.

BA: Could be that they were, but not me. I wasn’t out there carousing or drinking. The group I hung around with in the camp, no.

MR: Speaking of Saturdays, was it often that you had to work a Saturday because you missed a day because of rain?

BA: I have something in one of the letters to that effect. I noticed that the spring was rather wet and we did lose some days. In one of the letters, I say that we had to make it up on Saturday. I’d forgotten that completely. What I don’t know is whether the Army let us go out to make up that time because for the Army, every damn Saturday morning we had to clean the barracks and get ready for inspection. I forget what else we had to do, but we did things like that. There was KP [kitchen patrol or kitchen police], but that could have been also during the week.

MR: We started talking last time in Missoula about the food. On page eight, you’ll find...I believe I got these from a Great Falls woman who wrote for the newspaper, The Great Falls
Tribune, and visited the camp. There’s a list here, on the bottom of page eight, starting with the
menu, and it’s just all this amazing food: peaches, scrambled eggs, bacon, toast, biscuits every
morning, all of this stuff, fried carrots, boiled potatoes.

BA: What camp was it? Let me tell you, I just got a letter from a fellow I’ve only begun
corresponding with through the pages of that NACCCA [National Association of Civilian
Conservation Corps Alumni]. He’s from Los Angeles. I told him about my findings. I told him
earlier that I thought the commandant was stealing money. I just wrote him recently from here
saying that I had it confirmed. I got a reply from him. He says, “It wasn’t that way in our camp.
Maybe because,” he said, “we had an honorable CO [commanding officer].” I think I’m
prepared to believe that—that the food in some camps was good. But it was not at the camp
that we were in. Charlie Green has it right here. He’s got it right here.

MR: I’ll have to get a copy of that in Missoula.

BA: I can tell you, if you can’t get it in Missoula, it’d be a place—Books West in Kalispell.

MR: Okay.

BA: Do you know where that is? Main and...

MR: I’ll have to get a copy of that.

BA: I have the pages, Matt, where he talks. Green talks about the food on...I’ll tell you what
they are. They’re 33, 34, 53, 54, and 65, 67.

MR: When I go to town, I’ll pick that up tonight.

BA: There are a lot of gaps in his telling of it. I think I may have mentioned that he mentioned
the figure 1,500 dollars a month that was split between the CO [Commanding Officer] and the
mess sergeant. It was an enormous sum in the year 1940. He implies that the commandant was
relieved of his command. He doesn’t say that right out.

I plan to examine this from Army records. I could find absolutely nothing in the Park Service
records. I wrote to a fellow who is a historian working in the Pentagon, Department of Defense.
I don’t know if he’s going to reply before I leave or not, but when I get back east I’m going to
pound on his door and ask him how does one go about finding such a record. If it exists. What
Green says is that this commandant came in to Green as he, the commandant, was leaving the
camp permanently, wondered how Green had found out. Well, Green doesn’t say how he
found out. The commandant then admitted to the 1,500 dollars a month to Green. It’s not a
coherent, but Green’s got it right that the food was no good. He mentions, actually, a food
strike. I don’t remember a food strike during my tenure, but we bitched about the food. I have

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in my letters, I may have told you, two things: one, there was not enough milk and, one, there was no butter. To this day, I may have said, “I will not eat apple butter.”

MR: That’s right.

BA: We got apple butter instead of regular butter. I was conscious of food because I was a skinny kid, and I thought I was going to be a baseball player. I needed to gain weight. I don’t have the letter, but I wrote...I sent a week’s menu to the family physician and he replied. I think it was a kind of evasive reply (laughs) or a noncommittal reply. I tell you this merely to show that I was indeed aware of the food. I also make a comment that I never ate so much in my life and I said that it must be the environment which is true. Working outdoors for the first time.

BA: While I’m on the subject of outdoors: I’ve thought about and I think that to subject a city kid, who never worked outside, to the rigors of a Montana winter was not the wisest thing in the world to do. I had every intention—again from my letters—that I was going to stay in the camps for about 18 months. Though I planned to go back east, we were allowed that privilege of being transferred after one year’s service. But that winter out here killed all desire to stay on.

I’ll tell you another thing it did. I can remember distinctly, somewhere along the line, I knew that I was not going to be part of a profession where I had to work outdoors. I trace it back to that harsh winter. As a matter of fact, when I entered the New York State College of Forestry in the fall of 1941, I selected a course which I knew would keep me from the outdoor part of forestry. There was that and the fact that there was a lot of chemistry in that thing that I wanted and I happened to take a liking to it as you will see in my biographical data. The summertime was great; the winters killed it. I suppose it’s all right for a kid who was brought up in that kind of environment. As part of that I have to tell you, Matt, that we did not get sufficient clothing for that kind of...

MR: That was going to be my next question.

BA: We were not clothed properly for that kind of work. For example, I don’t know if I told you...I’ve got it in one of these letters. We had army issue shoes, which were flat with leather soles. They got slipperier than hell on the wet trees. There was talk of hobnailed boots. Ultimately, we got them, but it was a long, long time. With real hobnails that enabled us to be able to stand on these logs which we had to do—working with the PV (?). Do you know what a PV is? Rolling the (unintelligible). Because there was a lot of rain and it added a certain risk. During the wintertime, I mentioned here, we had only knitted gloves. That was not enough. I have to say also that I have a picture...This I can recall: on some winter days, when there was no wind, we could work in long johns—

[Break in audio]
BA: —just a khaki shirt. If we kept moving. The humidity was down—it’s low anyway in the cold weather. Some of the winter, we could tolerate, but some was nasty. As I say, I don’t remember ever missing a day in the wintertime. That was two-fold, almost compounding the felony: the cold weather and the absence of proper gear.

MR: There was, in here, some guy who wrote a letter to Michael Ober who wrote an article on the CCC. This fellow wrote a letter to Michael Ober saying, “Your information is wrong; the first camp was started at this time.” Alfred Stroud (?).

BA: What page are you on?

MR: Seven. Bottom of seven and top of eight. He’s talking about how the shoes that he got were World War One surplus that had been used. It took a while for him to get used to used shoes.

BA: I don’t think we got used shoes. I think we got a new issue at Camp Dix in New Jersey. But I have something of clothing here. I have letters where I wrote back home asking for clothing because we didn’t get enough. We didn’t have enough towels. When we sent out a dirty towel to the camp laundry, we didn’t have a fresh towel. Let me see if I can dig that up. I can show you. I have a schedule for the day which I’ll tell you about. How long does that play, Matt?

MR: An hour a side.

BA: As a matter of fact, I started to index that, but I haven’t picked the things out here. Those are some of the subjects...I can do that when I get back home and send you the excerpts both from the handwritten, from the actual letter, and my typed.

MR: I would appreciate them.

BA: I was studying typing—I typed that earlier. I did have something...I’m looking (quotes from letter): “Here’s what I need. Two bath towels, two face towels, one washrag, one dozen handkerchief, baseball cap.”

I explain why, somewhere, but not here. I tell them about the laundry. As I said, we were bereft of any towels while the stuff was out at the laundry. We kind of had a flimsy issue of things. What does he say? Six pairs of socks? We may have gotten five. I may have a record of that.

MR: Two overall jackets. He makes a comment that he was pretty pleased because his, of the camp, were new.

BA: What kind of jackets?

MR: Overall jackets.
BA: Two of them?

MR: One pair of workpants, size 40 waist, much too big for him.

BA: I’ll tell you another thing that I’m allergic to, sensitized to: denim. To this day, I don’t like denim because we wore that in the wintertime. That was not proper. Even with long johns, that was insufficient in the winter. Also, in the Navy, we got denim and that’s another reason I don’t like denim.

MR: Two-fold reason. Understandable, for sure.

BA: I’m reminded of the denim. I know what he’s talking about: that denim jacket. I’ll tell you about the Navy. In the Navy, they had that pea coat. That wasn’t enough for the wintertime. It’s a little digression from the CCC, but it’s a similar...In the dead of winter, in Samson, New York, which is very cold—not as bad as Montana—I had a scarf that I had gotten a hold of. I was not allowed to wear the scarf. It was out of uniform. The officers had scarves; we couldn’t wear it. That goddamn pea coat was literally open. The navy blouse was open. Nothing to close the winds—don’t get me started.

MR: Please do!

BA: I can’t find anything about the issue of clothing. That’s because I’m looking very hard. Wait a minute.

Here it is. First letter, April 14. I used the word (unintelligible). We got a toothbrush, comb, shaving set, two pair of dungarees—that’s the denim—and shirts to match, one pair of khaki pants—that’s the dress trousers—and two shirts to match, three pair of long underwear—that’s long johns—and six pairs of socks. That’s right. One pair of shoes, one raincoat and hat, one overcoat, and a small jacket. That was the issue; that was the winter issue. Where is it about the towels?

My nose was always running. I had hay fever all the time.

MR: This is a bad place to have hay fever.

BA: No, up here was perfect in the summertime. No ragweed up here, at these altitudes. My nose was always running—winter and summer. Ragweed season is middle of August through well into September. It never bothered me here. It bothered me before and after. I don’t see anything about the towels.

MR: Quite frequently up here in the spring, there are yellow clouds of pine pollen.
BA: Some people could be allergic to other pollens, but ragweed is the one that bothers me. It did for many years—not for some time. And lots of others.

I will index that and send it. Maybe on a different copy, I’ll send them to you.

MR: Excellent. That would be wonderful.

BA: Okay. That’s a promise. Here’s April 14:

Already I was swinging an axe, cutting logs. I’d never had an axe in my hand in my life. It’s two days after we got here. I say (quotes from letter), “I got tired and stopped!” (laughs) And then I say—the optimist, “I’ll get used to it, though. I’m eating like a horse.”

You want a menu? I’ll give you a menu: “For today’s breakfast, I had oatmeal, two portions of bacon and eggs.” That didn’t last very long—I can tell you. “Coffee, bread, four slices of white bread”—which I don’t like—that store bought kind. “Only, I had only one slice of butter, one pat, and coffee. I haven’t had any black bread or milk here or on the train.” We were on the train three and a half days; they never gave us a glass of milk.

There it is. I have some other things. I will go through. It’s spread out. Maybe the family can come up with letters after September 1, 1939. I don’t know why they do not continue after that date. I do have the Xeroxes of these original letters.

MR: Another thing that interested me about what I read from here and from a sprinkling of the notes in the library is school—classes. You weren’t required to attend any classes at all.

BA: Yes. I’ve forgotten a lot of that, if not all of it. I’d forgotten that I was in typing class. There was some instruction there. Here’s the workday. (quotes from letter) Here’s our schedule for one day: “Up at 6:30, breakfast at 7:00, work call at 7:30.” That means we lined up out there. “Quitting time, 11:15.” That’s almost four hours. “Dinner, 12:00.” From 11:15 to 12:00, we were taken by truck to the work site. “Work call, 1:00.” This is interesting—“Quitting, 3:30 pm.” I thought it was longer than that. “Supper, 5:00.” We had an hour and a half. “Lights out at 10:00.”

I make a note, which I’ll explain. We have to travel about four miles, so we go in trucks. Again, lights go out at 10:00, but we are not required to be in bed. We just have to report to work the next morning. On Saturday and Sunday, we eat breakfast at 8:00. Saturday is housecleaning day, when we fix up the barracks. That’s for the army.

MR: Cleaning day for the army.

BA: There was an educational advisor. I still remember his name. Allen, his last name was Allen. As charge of the library, some of the foremen teach classes. My forestry course is taught by a
foreman. So, there were classes. I mentioned, somewhere, something on soil conservation. And there was the typing class. Or, there was a typewriter and I must have...I had started to type, actually, when I was in high school. Then, I may even have been in a typing class. I learned on a portable that one of my sisters had where she was earning some extra money. My typing goes back a long way.

MR: I wish my typing went back a long ways. I can’t type worth beans.

BA: You can’t? I find it invaluable. I have to tell you, Matt, I see that I have some unkind things to say about the instruction.

MR: Wonderful.

BA: Let me see what I say here. I said, “My forestry course is taught by a foreman. However, I’ll tell you this much about it: all we learn, we learn on our own hook. He doesn’t do anything.”

That’s the comment of a 17 and a half year old.

MR: Wow.

BA: That’s in a letter dated May 16. Here’s one dated May 18. I’m still on part of another letter. I’m talking about a cousin of mine who wanted to join the CCC and I say, “I don’t want to discourage him, but if he really wants to learn forestry, this isn’t such a good place. All the learning is on our own. There is no instruction to speak of.”

That’s the comment I had. Of course, later on I had a lot of dealings with academia. (laughs)

MR: Speaking of forestry, I mention in here...Later on, when I’m talking about the work that the enrollees did, I mention something about the park forester. My advisor read that and he thought that national park forester was a contradiction in terms, that there was no such thing as a park forester. Do you recall there being park foresters?

BA: There were rangers then and now. I think that was their job title—ranger. But there’s certainly a discipline of forestry. I don’t know if I can answer your question. I’m thinking about now and then. I’m certain that the Park Service employs foresters as such, but whether they are also rangers, I don’t know that. That’s easy enough to find out, I think, by writing away to the NPS [National Park Service] and asking about their job descriptions. My recollection is that these were rangers who knew forestry. That’s about as close as I can come to it, Matt.

MR: That makes sense. That’s just what I need. Besides studies, I recall from reading reminiscences and everything that sports played a pretty important part.

BA: Absolutely.
MR: You were involved in sports?

BA: Baseball. Just one sport—and basketball. We organized a baseball team very early under the sponsorship of a fine old gentleman, now deceased. I tried to see him in 1983. By the name Gene Sullivan. He organized the teams, got us the equipment, scheduled the games, and was a general supporter. I was talking to a fellow over here by the name Claude Tesmer who was at the graveyard—what they call the graveyard. A Park Service employee. He knew Sullivan. I told him about the baseball. He said, “Gene, during the World Series, you couldn’t get him away from the radio.”

Baseball was a very important part of our...my summer activity. I can remember getting off from work and the first thing we would do, we’d play pepper. You know what pepper is? Someone throws and the other one hits it softly. Also, I found myself on the basketball team. We were no good, but we had a team anyway. I’ve got a picture of us in the back of a truck. We were taken to Superior, Montana for a basketball tournament in the wintertime. Put in the back of a truck. I think we were huddled up to keep warm. This showed that the food in another camp was very, very good. That was an Ohio company.

Sports was an important part of my life. I know that I subscribed to a weekly journal called The Sporting News. I don’t know if you know it. I have a picture of me lying on a bunk, reading a paper and it’s The Sporting News. There’s a lot of that in here on another family matter because I always thought I was going to be a baseball player. I probably would have been if I weighed more than 130 pounds. I played baseball as a freshman at Syracuse University and I weighed all of 130 pounds. That was a certain handicap there.

Boxing was an important sport, but I didn’t participate in that. They had an extensive boxing tournament. The finals were held in Missoula at the army base. Boxing is a big thing in the Army and Navy. That was another sport. Nothing like volleyball. No golf. I can’t think of any other sports. No track and field events. No football.

MR: From what I understood, boxing, baseball, and basketball were the three big ones.

BA: You didn’t need much for those things. Maybe the most I guess, baseball called for more equipment than the others.

MR: There’s a camp, I believe it was GNP [Glacier National Park] 7. It was up on Anaconda Creek, I believe. There was a comment in the paper you’ll read—something about even before the camp was built—it took such a long time build the camp because one of the first things they did was put in a baseball diamond.

BA: I wouldn’t doubt it one bit. We had the baseball field already for us here. It’s still there. In fact, I can show it to you if you’re interested. The backstop is there. The infield is overgrown

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with grass, but you can still see patches of dirt where the infield is. That was the baseball diamond. That was a short distance from camp, walking distance. I believe it.

Now suppose I cut us cheese and crackers and—


(Break in audio)

BA: ...the female market. They (unintelligible) them. That’s what happens with cigarettes. Someone got the idea, way, way back. I don’t know if you’ve ever read about this story. Look at all we’re losing. We’re losing half the population or more who are not smokers. The females. Some publicist came up with this idea. He’s famous for his stunts. In the Easter parade in New York, 5th Avenue parade, he had women smoking cigarettes. It always makes the front pages of the New York papers. This is in the ‘20s. That’s how the female cigarette market got its start. That’s what the goddamn brewers have done: sweetened up the beer so it would appeal to the women. They screwed up all the male drinkers. That’s my opinion.

MR: I really enjoy Harp—

BA: I know the beer.

MR: —from Ireland. I have some rather good friends who are from Ireland who live in Portland. Whenever I go to visit them in Portland, we make sure we have a stock of Harps on hand. BA: There’s a—I call them gin mills (unintelligible)—saloon called Ireland’s Own. They sell Harp beer on draft.

MR: Wonderful.

BA: You’re going to be in Fort Wayne for Christmas?

MR: Yes. Bloomington is between Fort Wayne and Indy, right?

BA: It’s south of Indianapolis—50 miles south. Well, I’ll be in touch with you when I get back east.

MR: We’ll be spending about two weeks in Indiana. We’re going to be driving down to Indianapolis. I used to live in Henderson, Kentucky, which borders on Evansville, Indiana.

BA: Near Owensboro [Kentucky] right?

MR: Exactly. We’re going to be driving down to Henderson...
BA: So you’ll be passing through Bloomington?

MR: We’ll be passing through Bloomington.

BA: So you’re originally from Kentucky? I worked in Louisville for two years. University of Louisville, for two years. When did you leave Kentucky?

MR: Actually, I was born up here. Born in Kalispell. In the fourth grade, we moved down to Kentucky until 1972 and then moved back up here in ’79. Just can’t get away...

BA: I was in Kentucky, Louisville, in the mid-50s.

MR: I like Louisville. Louisville (pronounces in dialect).

BA: Louisville. Just the way the easterners pronounce the state capital here is Hel-ee-na. You know immediately they’re not from here.

MR: Right. Not a native.

BA: We learned that pretty quickly. Do you have that thing on? I’ll tell you another thing: we hitch-hiked. I left with the Park Service headquarters some pictures of a fellow with whom I hitch-hiked to Butte. He’s now a famous actor. His name is Walter Matthau. I don’t know if you...

MR: No!

BA: We got rides. One of the first things I remember people telling us was that Gary Cooper and Myrna Loy were from Montana. Did you know about that?

MR: No, I didn’t know.

BA: Did you know of those actors?

MR: Yes.

BA: They would proudly proclaim that these were Montanans: Gary Cooper and Myrna Loy.

MR: I didn’t know that. I thought the only person we could claim was Chet Huntley.

BA: Yes, from Big Sky. But was he a Montanan originally?

MR: From what I understand—I don’t know. But I didn’t know about Myrna Loy and Gary Cooper.
BA: His partner, Brinkley [David Brinkley], in broadcasting was from West Virginia somewhere I think...

MR: But you hitch-hiked with Walter Matthau?

BA: To Butte, Montana. He went to visit a friend of his somewhere down in Whitehall, as I remember, and we each headed back to camp on our own. I have pictures. I have two pictures with him alone and one with some fellows we ran into in Butte. We didn’t know them. We just made friends. We could spot them as CC boys, and they spotted us. I think they might have been in “civvies” as we called them and I believe I was—as was Walt—in the CCC trousers. We got together, and I got a picture of Matthau and those two fellows of whose names I have no idea after all these years.

I rode a freight to Spokane, Washington. The city boys, I guess, feel the need for the city, more or less. One week, we went to Butte and, the other, to Spokane. I don’t know if I told you this story. Going out there, we road in an empty boxcar which wasn’t bad, but coming back, we couldn’t find any empties. I see that looking out the window here. The trains going east are full. The ones going west are sometimes full, but sometimes they have empty cars. That must have been how it was then because all we could find...the cars were sealed, but we found a flat car carrying huge timbers. We got into the freight yards in Spokane. This was Christmas, New Year’s, 1939. We were warned—I forget where—don’t get down in the bottom because the load can shift and you’ll get crushed. We sat on the top of the timbers...after New Year’s, January 2nd or whatever it was. I remember we had to take off our shoes to keep our feet warm. We stuck them on someone else’s belly...I don’t know how we did that.

I can remember, we were stopped in the freight yard by what we used to call “railroad dicks.” I don’t know if we looked suspicious or not, but I was the one who carried a letter from the commandant. I don’t know how I came on to that idea, saying we were on leave from the camp. We showed it to them and he shone a flashlight on it and they let us go. Maybe they told us some one robbed a vending machine or something. They frisked us, didn’t find anything, and they let us go. They had no accounts to hold us with that letter to show we weren’t vagrants. We had our CCC coats on, all of us...What color were they? It must have been khaki. Khaki coat. I didn’t come out here in a coat. I came out here in April.

MR: We talked a little bit and I just want to talk more with you about people’s attitudes towards their experience in the CCC. You mentioned something about people being almost ashamed to admit that...

BA: Some are. I knew of one. Conceal their CCC experience. Some proudly proclaim it, some, I suppose, are nostalgic about it. This group I belong to, evidently, falls into that category where they’d like it to be known, possibly even memorialize it. My own view on that is that it could be
memorialized, but only with legislation: creating and recreating that and making it permanent. Not as an emergency relief...what was it called?


BA: ECW, right. Emergency and Conservation Works. As you know, the name CCC came in only...although it may have been called that at the beginning, it wasn’t legislated until much later.

MR: You talked to Bill Sharpe?

BA: No. I’ve written to him, but he hasn’t replied. Have you talked to him?

MR: I’ve not talked to him. I’ve written to him...

(Break in audio)

BA: ...Miller, the ranger, trying to preserve the wilderness aspect by not driving the game and here’s first law, self-protection, but unwitting. We didn’t know.

MR: It had never occurred to me that I have not seen anything about a bear incident.

BA: Well, Green mentions that. A noise is I think the word he used. He gives an explanation which makes sense. They tell you, when you going to walk along the trails, take the bells or make some noise so the bears will hear you before they see you and they’re not taken unawares. I think that’s interesting. To me it is, anyway. The things you remember, it’s funny. Little snippets of conversation. Brain holds on to that and big things like this fellow who was picked up for stealing a car: no recollection. One explanation may be that it was somewhat remote. I was not involved, but only maybe just heard about it.

MR: Well, what I’ll do—

[End of Side A]
BA: —possibly in this three month addendum, as it were, of which Vazquez was part. It was what we called a Puerto Rican contingent, now referred to as Hispanic. These kids were from New York. The thing I remember is we had a long urinal and somebody—we always ascribed it to someone in this contingent—they didn’t know what a urinal was for and they defecated in the urinal. They defecated in it. This was more civilization, evidently, then they had ever seen, some of them. Though I can’t understand, if they had come from New York, they must have known what a toilet was. They mistook the urinal for the toilet.

MR: A long toilet.

BA: My recollection is that there were ten or so of them. I guess they kept pretty much to themselves. That’s my only recollection of that group because we didn’t have that much to do with them and vice versa.

MR: I would imagine.

BA: There was a language barrier there. I cannot think of too much else about them. I don’t know. Can you think of any questions that would jog my memory about something of your interests?

MR: I couldn’t think of any questions last night that I hadn’t already touched on.

BA: Well, if they occur to you, jot them down and—

MR: You entered the Navy right after you got out—

BA: No, I had to make up some courses, some high school courses, for admission. I knew then that I would be going to college, but I didn’t know where or when. Actually, I started with this correspondence course in algebra from the University of Idaho. I’d forgotten that completely, but I remember someone...I think this actor fellow told me he remembered me pouring over the algebra book. Sometime later, he was reminded of that. But I didn’t finish it. I don’t know the reason. I spent some time making up algebra, geometry, trigonometry, chemistry. I later became a PhD chemist. I didn’t have any chemistry when I graduated from high school. So that took a little time. I must have had some job. I entered the New York State College of Forestry in the fall of 1941. Within three months, there was Pearl Harbor. I managed to stay there two years. That killed everything. Then I went into the Navy. After getting out of the Navy, I returned to...

MR: Syracuse.

BA: This time to the University, not the New York State College of Forestry.
MR: Oh, okay.

BA: Where I majored in chemistry. Then I went on to graduate school later. That’s how that took place. I tell you again, I think I owe it to the CCCs for, ultimately, entering college. There’s no question in my mind from my recollection and from rereading, reading and rereading, those letters home. I was being prodded by one of my family, and I have long letter in reply.

MR: That’s because you wanted to find something where you didn’t have to work outside?

BA: First of all, I was convinced I should go to college, that there was no future...If you read Masters’ letter—Carl Masters—he alludes to the fact...He comes right out...but I had in mind when I was up there, I wasn’t going to get a job in forestry that had me out in the woods in the wintertime. It was not for me. I tell you, a Syracuse, New York, winter is maybe not as bad as one out here, but it’s bad enough. I think they may even get more snow in Syracuse. If I needed any reinforcement of that view, it was that stint in a Syracuse winter. After the first year in the forestry college, we could make some kind of choices. First year, we had no choices. It was in the second year there that I made that choice that would take me into an area where I didn’t have to be outside. Also, these descriptive portions, like dendrology and botany—I didn’t care to look through a microscope. I didn’t care for dendrology very much. I stuck to pulp and paper manufacture—was the major—which had lots of chemistry.

MR: What did you do in the FDA [Food and Drug Administration]?

BA: People have always asked me that, and I tell them somewhat facetiously—but there’s an underlying truth—to try to keep the pharmaceutical industry honest. What I did as a chemist was review the chemistry part of drug applications that were submitted for approval. The industry is full of tricks. Medically, it’s full of tricks. Chemically, it’s full of tricks. In advertising and promotion. That’s some of the things that I plan to get done when I go to Bloomington. I have, for example, my own reviews of applications and things like that. I think, no one has written has about this...

MR: I see.

BA: ...about the role of chemistry in the Food and Drug Administration. That’s where a drug gets its start. It gets started, probably, in the mind of an organic chemist who says, “Maybe we ought to synthesize this molecule or that molecule.” Not physicians. The physicians then use the outcome of the product of chemistry labor, thought.

MR: My dad was a chemist.

BA: Was he?
MR: For the Anaconda Aluminum Company.

BA: How about that. Was there a smelter in Great Falls?

MR: There is one in Columbia Falls.

BA: Right here in Columbia Falls? I have to see that. Whereabouts?

MR: It’s north of town. Anybody in town knows where the plant is.

BA: It’s still active? It’s an aluminum smelter? Where do they get the ore from?

MR: Jamaica. Almost all of it’s from Jamaica.

BA: Bauxite. That takes a lot of power. They get the power from the Hungry Horse Dam.

MR: I worked there seven years ago for a summer. We found out that they use a million dollars of power a month. That plant right there uses a third of the power used in the state of Montana.

BA: I know enormous quantities are required for...I’ll have to go up there and pay a visit.

MR: My brother-in-law is a technician on one of the potlines, where they do the actual smelting. Next weekend, they are having an open house, and they’re going to be running tours.

BA: The whole of Saturday and Sunday?

MR: Saturday and Sunday.

BA: How about that? I will look into that. Do they do anything with the fluorine that is a byproduct of that?

MR: You’ll find that the aluminum plant is here and there’s a mountain just directly behind it.

BA: Swag?

MR: No it was a regular mountain. In the ‘50s, I believe, when they were first starting up the fluorine, it was not a factor. People just didn’t recognize it. They didn’t know its damage. It just killed the mountain.

BA: With the fluorine? I believe it.
MR: Just stripped the mountain. Then, the Anaconda Company bought the mountain and cleaned up their act. They put in scrubbers and all this kind of stuff just to prove that a plant can exist next to a living biosphere.

BA: This mountain was destroyed by the fumes? Sure. Hydrofluoric acid fumes. My god, that would tear one apart.

MR: Now that our mountain lions, goats, elk, deer, and horse...

BA: The fluorine or fluoride is not recovered as such.

MR: They collect the fumes in the top of the buildings...no, from the processing cells because it’s released with the aluminum and the oxygen. It’s pumped to scrubbers and I don’t know what they do...

BA: I’ll look into that when I go up there. They ship the ore all the way from Jamaica.

MR: Most of it’s from Jamaica.

BA: I know that Haiti is also a source of bauxite and probably some other places in the Caribbean.

MR: They get ore from mostly Jamaica, but also Australia and New Zealand. This is an interesting plant because it was...for a long time, it belonged to the Atlantic Richfield Company [ARCO] that...

(Break in audio)

BA: ...I think he’s nothing but a son of a bitch because I’ve watched him on the CSPAN. I can understand conservative thinking, but this is what I call regressive and reactionary thinking. I’ve seen him display that on some other legislation.

MR: From Virginia?

BA: He’s from Texas. I think he’s from the Dallas area. It took him a long, long time to reply to my letter. A long while. I don’t have it here, but if I have it...I know I have it. I’ll dig it up. Anyway, he’s part of a breed there in the house that no matter what you would want to do, he’d vote against it—on a doctrinaire basis. You don’t do that kind of thing. Simple as that. Republicans from Texas. Not that the Democrats in Texas are any better.

MR: I lived in Houston for a while. I became familiar with Texans much to my displeasure.

BA: They’re different.
MR: They are certainly a different lot.

BA: I know. I’ve been to Texas. I have a friend in College Station and I’ve been through central Texas. When I was in the Navy, I was in Galveston. I know a little bit about the state.

MR: There was a professor at the university, Don Hofsommer, from Midland, Odessa. He taught college there and came up here last year as a replacement. Now he’s in South Dakota at the Center for Western Studies in Augustana College. He reminded me of all the Texans I’ve ever met. Any example that he drew on was based on Texas. We were talking about something and he said, “As if the Mexicans came up the Sabine River in Rosewood.” What the heck is the Sabine River? They’re very parochial.

BA: Texans, I think, detest the Mexicans more than they detest blacks, from my observation.

MR: I believe that.

What work did you do?

BA: I have a bunch of stuff. I’ll tell you what it is off the top of my head. In fact, I mentioned that in the Bartlett letter. I’ll just digress to say, I know you can’t do this kind of work in New York City, representative of Bartlett, but nevertheless my experience here was of some use. What we did: we felled snags—you know what a snag is; a snag is a burned over tree—from the 1929 fire. Evidently, it was a short distance from the camp. As you heard, we were taken out there by truck. We did a lot of that. We did...

MR: Speaking of that, there have been quite a few comments from modern historians who say that the work that the CCC did...Really it was strange that that kind of work was performed in a national park because that, in their mind, contradicts the purpose of a national park. Preservation versus wise use.

BA: Let nature take its course.

MR: Did that occur to you guys at all?

BA: No. We didn’t have that kind of concept. We never thought about things like that, but I know what you’re talking about because my last visit here, I learned from the park librarian—maybe some others—about a later, newer, concept with respect to fires, which was to let nature take its course. The only problem with that it is, as was pointed out to me, one of them got out of hand in the park. I understand the, I might call it, doctrinaire or maybe fundamentalist conservationism, but as kids we weren’t alerted to any of those nuances. But I can see where it might engender some discussion amongst the more learned.
All we did was get on each end of the bucksaw. It was a lot of fun at the beginning. There was never an accident that I can remember. We’d holler “Timber!” and then down the road or up the road. There was never an accident. We kids became pretty adept at that in that we could drop a tree where it was supposed to go. I don’t know about our productivity. Someone might argue about that, but we were proficient with respect to aiming the tree along the projected path. Of course, the lumber was useful to serve as fuel, so there was at least that purpose as well. We did that for some time, I would say. For some time. After the tree was felled, we’d trim off the branches and cut them up into links big enough to get on the truck—a flatbed truck. The truck would haul it to camp and we would then, at camp, cut them up into smaller links for fuel, for firewood. After they were cut into smaller links, we would split them with the axe—a double bit axe.

I can still remember, once the axe slipped and it cut the shoe, but never got my toe. That’s as close as I’ve ever come to an accident. The axe must have slipped somehow or I didn’t aim it right. I can still remember it cutting the leather of the heavy, heavy toed shoe. It wasn’t a special toe; it was just one of those army shoes. I don’t know if you’ve ever seen them. That’s as close as I ever came to getting hurt.


BA: That was one task. Another was we were on two big fires that I can remember when we stayed out overnight. Where they were, I have no idea. Or how long we were there. It was at least overnight in probably both cases. I’ve been reading some records, Matt, and I see that individual crews went out during the day to deal with smaller fires. I don’t remember being on that, but we were...I was part of what was called a smoke chaser crew. I don’t know where I saw it, but I think there were about 12 men. We would be informed of a lightning strike. I have what I think is a pretty lucid account written contemporaneously. You’ll see it when I take it and send it out, but I can tell you because I’ve been rereading it. We would go to the approximate locale or location by truck. Then we would go on foot. Of course, we would never find it. We knew that we would have difficulty finding it. These are thick woods. These strikes were merely smoldering; they were spotted by the lookouts. Nothing like a crown fire. This was the possible genesis of a fire.

When we thought we were nearby, we would set up the radio. That was my job: I carried the radio and operated it. It was heavier than hell. That was the heaviest thing out there. Why they assigned that to me, I don’t know why. They thought maybe I was a little more articulate than some of the others. (laughs) I don’t know the reason. I don’t know if I volunteered. Anyway, we would set up the radio and contact the ranger station. Then, we would tell them we were going to light a flare. We would light something which sputtered for about five minutes. That ranger station would then get a fix, telling us where we were. There was a second ranger station which also gave us a fix. What we knew then was the triangulation. They knew where we were. They knew where the fire was. They told us what direction to take on the compass.
The letter says, “By God, we would go right to it.” We would go right to it. I forget how far we would be. Not too far. There it would be and I guess we...I have some description of what we did. If it was smoldering, we would fell the tree to make sure it didn’t run up, I suppose, or down to the ground. We’d scrub out the dirt. That’s another job—smoke chasing.

MR: In my researches, I’ve found the term “flying crew”.

BA: Flying squad. That’s right.

MR: Same thing?

BA: Same thing. We were the flying squad, except we never got in the airplane the way they did down in Missoula with the smokejumpers. In fact, I visited there. I got a picture of the visitor’s facility. That’s right. We were called the flying squad. This was during the heart of the fire season. The way I described it, this was good duty because we were on two days and off two days. When we were on, we weren’t always called out. So we lounged around camp, being on the ready. That was very nice. I forget the name of the foreman, but I think I have it down somewhere. I’m not sure. Maybe I can guess at it. That’s another thing we did.

We were putting in a water line. I can remember digging a trench. I never knew how heavy muck was that you dig up from the bottom of...I know; we were building a coffer dam. They were going to lay pipe. I don’t think it was ever used, but we did some of that. We did some of that. It was very, very hard work. It’s a funny thing, but I don’t remember what we did in the winter. I think we went back to felling trees in the wintertime. We did some concrete work. I don’t know what the hell we built, but we did some of that. I’m a little fuzzy on precisely what we did there. It must have been around for something for the camp. Then we did something with the campgrounds, but I don’t remember what that was. What’s now the...must be the Apgar campground.

MR: The campground expansion, the clearing trees, making campsites, fireplaces, and all that—

BA: That was part of the work. It could be that we did some of that. I don’t have a recollection of it. The GNP—I think that was leveled pretty early with the idea of making a campground out of it. It was already flattened out. The stumps were removed. It was—

MR: Was there much interaction between camps?

BA: I was talking about this the other day in the library. I do not remember any other camps on this side of the park. Though the maps show that there was a Camp 9 just below us, I have no recollection of that camp. The way I reason this is I say that, in order to play another camp team in a baseball game, we went over to Logan Pass on July 4 to play a game either on Many Glacier or Lake Sherburne. I don’t know where. Hell, if they had camps nearby, they surely would have
had a baseball team, right? The first thing they did was build a baseball diamond. But I don’t remember any of that.

We played town teams in Columbia Falls. I don’t know where else. Coram. A few other places, I guess. I do not remember playing any other CCC camps except that one on the eastern side of the divide. This was in the summer of 1939. By that time, I have to conclude that if the barracks were still standing, they were not occupied, which brings me into conflict with some of the records because they say that one of the places on this side of the park was in existence for the 16th period. Our camp was in existence through the 15th period, which was after I had left. I forget. I wrote it down.

MR: September ’41, 15 closed. GNP 15 closed in September ’41.

BA: ’41?

MR: ’40, excuse me. September ’40.

BA: There you go. I left there in March of ’40. That’s right. Even when I was there, I don’t remember GNP 9 being in existence. I think the records are not correct, from my recollection. How about another beer, Matt?

MR: That would be wonderful if you have it.

BA: Yes, we have...let me see...

(Break in audio)

MR: Okay. Sorry.

BA: Can you hear us there?

MR: Yes.

BA: I don’t know how you could trace that down. Someone suggested that maybe the archives in Washington, D.C. as a source. I plan to look at some of that when I get back. Mark Hufstetler. Do you know the name? He works in the library. He’d been there to the archives just recently. I have a researcher’s card on another matter, which I haven’t used to diligently. I have a key to a locker. They give you a locker and a key. I’ll have to have it renewed. I find some of what I would construe to be a discrepancy between the existing records and my recollection. I have to tell you, I think that my reasoning is very sound, if my recollection is any good. Hell, we would have been playing baseball games all the time. Evidently, there wasn’t enough in the camp to get an intra-squad game going.

Burton Appleton Interview, OH 272-001, Archives and Special Collections, Mansfield Library, University of Montana-Missoula.
MR: Fascinating.

BA: There are some gaps, of course, in these records here.

MR: Substantial gaps. That was frustrating trying to put...

BA: Hufstetler’s explanation was that some of this may have gone over to the National Archives. I don’t know.

MR: Have you tried to deal with the district branch offices of the archives? The National Archives? I am afraid to even try it because the CCC...the Glacier National Park records were originally sent to Denver. Denver was the regional branch office of the National Archives. A few years ago, they changed the regional district office to Seattle, but they didn’t send everything they had in Denver to Seattle. Half of the stuff from Glacier is in Denver; half of it is in Seattle.

BA: Is that right?

MR: Yes. It’s entirely frustrating.

BA: Page is in Denver. The bureaucracy sometimes has nothing else to do but move musical chairs...

[End of Tape 2, Side A]
BA: You’re right: the gaps do lend itself to a certain frustration. I keep telling myself, if the commandant was relieved, how could that have been kept out of the papers? That would make real news around here. One thing I’m going to look up is this guy who was sentenced to 90 days in Kalispell jail for stealing a car. I have the memorandum Xeroxed. What’s interesting, this Gene Sullivan about whom I’ve spoken, the manager, saw it. He looked out the window and he saw a pickup that he recognized immediately from someone he knew in Coram. He called up the guy and said, “What’s your truck doing out here? What’s your pickup...?”

“I don’t know it was stolen.”

Before the truck was returned, they searched it. They were thinking of having it fingerprinted on the outside, but it was ruled out, I don’t know why. They found a button on the floor of the car. A search was instituted of the camp. It doesn’t say anymore, but I presume the camp was searched while we were out to work. Sure enough, they found a fellow whose suit was missing that button. They confronted him with this and he admitted it. He was sentenced to 90 days in jail. I don’t know what happened to him after, whether he was...Let me get some more crackers...whether he was discharged or what. I believe that must have made the papers. Just a little vignette.

MR: No. For some reason that sounds...

BA: You think it could have escaped...

MR: No. I think...

BA: You know about that story?

MR: It’s vaguely familiar. I’ve read it somewhere. Talking with Mark Lober (?), we went through a list of newspapers that the Flathead Valley Community College library has collected. We went through and ruled out papers that weren’t in existence. He said that he had found a lot of valuable stuff in the Daily Interlake and in the Columbia Falls...the Hungry Horse...I don’t believe the Hungry Horse News...

BA: It wasn’t in existence then. That’s right. I just learned that the other day. You’re right.

MR: They had another Columbia Falls small newspaper.

BA: Does that Columbia Falls paper still exist?

MR: The Hungry Horse News does. The other one doesn’t though.
BA: How would one go back to the Columbia Falls papers of that era? Kalispell?

MR: They have all of them at the Flathead Valley Community College library. Or the Kalispell library there. They’re at the Kalispell library.

BA: If I had come onto this information a little earlier, I might have spent some of the time doing what Bill Sharp has done, but I wouldn’t want to reproduce his work, certainly.

MR: That would be a tough thing to do.
BA: Is that one of the things a historian has to do? Go through newspaper accounts? Do you put much reliance on—

MR: With newspaper accounts, you always have to consider the political standings of the editor, how the event affects the community in general. If in the national perspective it’s an important event, but it’s detrimental to the community, naturally the newspaper accounts are going to be slanted in that respect. I have found that you really have to take newspaper accounts with some grain of salt.

BA: We learn as we grow older not to trust implicitly in the accuracy of the newspaper account, even with the best of reporters. I came across that personally in about the year 1950 for the first time. I have learned to read newspapers with a certain skepticism, even the best of the newspapers. I would imagine that a historian would take an even dimmer view, unless he could get corroborated...

MR: That’s the important thing. If you can find even two newspapers that’ll say the same thing, then you can put stock in what they have to say. I’m kind of ashamed of this paper. You’ll find on the copy that I’m going to leave you, my advisor put a grade on it.

BA: If you don’t want to...

MR: No. He gave me an A minus. Minus just so that I wouldn’t have to rewrite it to get an A in the class. It was borderline. For instance, when I talk about the various camps, it’s what he considers a deadening account. I just list the camp, when it was in operation, the companies that were there. It was a first try.

BA: You need certain cold data. I don’t know how you can enliven it.

MR: The way he suggests I do that is put it in some kind of graph—a table.

BA: Tabulate it.
MR: Put it in the appendix. Say, if you need to find out when each camp was in existence, go back there. My advisor's name is Duane Hampton [H. Duane Hampton], and he's quite well known in western history. He's a western historian.

BA: Richardson says—I may have told you, if I'm repeating myself—that Salmond's account didn't have enough of the human interest element in it. I found it interesting enough.

MR: It's the seminal work that we have now. It's about as complete as anything that's ever been written. [John A. Salmond, *The Civilian Conservation Corps 1933-1942: A New Deal Case Study* (1967)].

BA: I think someone will probably write another history of that era—of that particular part of the era.

MR: To get the fellowship, I had to go before a committee. They made suggestions on my thesis topic. They suggested that I not limit myself to Glacier Park, that I consider the...The historical significance of that is dimmer because it is so parochial, so local. They suggested that I compare the CCC experience in Glacier with that in similar national parks, like Yellowstone, Rocky Mountain National Park. I think my final product is going to take that kind of a form.

BA: That wouldn't be duplicating any of Hanson's thesis at Wyoming?

MR: Yes, I think it would, but my emphasis would be on Glacier, whether it was different or similar to other experiences.

BA: I read somewhere that the first camp in Glacier was actually the second CCC camp in existence. Are you familiar with that?

MR: Yes.

BA: The first one being in Virginia, the state of Virginia. I think it was renamed Camp Roosevelt.

MR: Camp Roosevelt.

BA: In my experience with this CCC organization, I noticed a woman who'd been in attendance there. She's the daughter of someone that she asserts to be the very first enrollee of in all of the CCC in the whole United States. One of the things that someone assigned to me as a volunteer was to try to find something. I never did that kind of research before: library work. I was all over the Labor Department. They didn't have a damn thing that would satisfy me. What I came up with was that there was lots of simultaneous enrollments in the major cities in the east. As soon as that legislation was signed by Roosevelt and enacted into law, the lines started to form all over Buffalo, New York, Philadelphia, and Pittsburgh. I think it would be virtually impossible...
MR: To find the very first.

BA: To be the very first. He may have been the first in Washington, D.C., but he wasn’t...To call someone the first in the nation would be stretching this thing beyond any semblance of reality, but she persisted for the longest time. It’s interesting. The daughter of a CCC boy wanted some recognition for that.

MR: In this paper, I’ve been harshly criticized for constantly using the term “CCC boys.” What did you refer to yourselves as?

BA: The official term was “enrollee,” but that term “CCC boys” was in wide use. I never felt...took offense to that as a black man would if you called him...The upper age limit was 25. Of course, they were no longer boys. There were some older fellows in the camp there. I know that they were not boys and they probably would not like to be considered as such. I didn’t take umbrage, personally, that I can recall. I think a neutral, safe term would be “enrollee”. In the army it would be what, a recruit?

MR: Yes.

BA: Army recruit. That’s almost one word. “CCC enrollee,” I think, is a prudent...

MR: Most of the harsh criticisms came from my colleagues, other students who were in the class. I’m learning, more and more, that our standards of judgment for others’ works really depend on our own strengths and weaknesses. The students were much more harsh on me than the professor was.

BA: Your peers were tougher. That sometimes happens. I think with maturity or age, we tend to soften a bit. “Young men” might be a term, but I don’t recall ever hearing that—“CCC young men.” That would have been too long.

MR: I’ve also heard “CCCs.”

BA: Or “Cs.” Or “the three Cs.” I’ve heard it referred to as that. That was another appellation.

MR: Because in a work of some 150-200 pages, reading “CCC boys” over and over would tend to get rather numbing.

BA: Maybe. One abbreviation—“the Cs.” Or, if you’re referring to the personnel—“camp personnel.” Come up with some synonymous, neutral expression.

MR: That’s my job, come up with new expressions.
BA: I have a little work to do, also, for you and that is to index those letters. I think there’s probably some other stuff. One of the things I wanted to do was go over some pictures with you, which we may not have an opportunity. One in particular I wanted to show you. Let me see if I can find it.

MR: Did you submit some photos to the library here?

BA: Yes, I did.

MR: Because I’m sure some of these are your photos. I copied a good lot of the best of them.

BA: What I gave them was these prints from which they Xeroxed. So I don’t know what you have. If you need some of these, we can arrange...This picture with all of us on the trucks, getting ready to go to work. This is me right there trying to get into the picture. Leaving for work. I wrote this at the time. I’ve identified some of the people. This is how we were sent to work, on these open trucks.

MR: Were you brought back from the worksite for lunch?

BA: Yes. For this job, I forgot to tell you. The firefighting, or the flying squad, we didn’t come back for lunch. Also, we were on a telephone crew. We actually put up telephone poles. We dug the holes. We got the poles, brought the poles along, put them in the ground. Lined up. Some of us—the foreman and the leaders—climbed the pole and strung the lines. For that, we also stayed out.

MR: You weren’t part of the crew that strung it over the pass?

BA: Over the pass? No. We were up in the west side of the park. I’m thinking about where did it go? From where to where? Clearly, it must have gone to one of the ranger stations, but I don’t know where the other end went. Maybe to the headquarters. I just have no idea. This is how we looked heading to work. I think this might have been a water tower, but I’m not sure. These were the leaders and this was the foreman. His name was Keller. This was the mess hall. This one is the mess hall. These are fellows whose names I no longer remember. They were part of a work crew. Oh, I do! I wrote it down at the time—Sweeney, Sheer, Ventimiglia (?). I wrote it down. I don’t always do that. This one I know: Charlie Pott. He’s a nice guy. This is MacDonald. He and I and one other by the name of Mittas (?), we went to Spokane in the dead of winter. These are some of the camp colleagues back in the barracks. Is there snow on the ground? Yes.

MR: Wow.

BA: This is me and some other fellow. Wait a minute. I know this guy. Anyway, this is how we went out to Superior, Montana to play in the basketball tournament. We rode in that truck.
MR: In an open truck.

BA: In an open truck. The picture I want...This is the fellow who climbed up the poles and set the lines. His name’s Lionni (?). Frank Lionni. This fellow was from Brooklyn. I saw him later, visited him in his home. This is a baseball game. That’s me up to bat. This was a sawmill that I learned from the park library was begun in January first or thereabouts—1939. We got the poles. In fact, I worked here. That’s another work detail I was on. We creosoted the base of those poles in this place...

MR: Telephone poles.
BA: We probably also sawed them into proper lengths and smoothed them out. We made them ready for sticking in the ground.

MR: So you worked in a sawmill?

BA: This was a sawmill, right. Here’s some of the...That’s right. We did a lot of work on those poles. There’s MacDonald again. There’s some more of that sawmill. I haven’t identified where...This was a workgroup. There’s that bucksaw that we used. I don’t know if I’m holding onto an ax. This was some of the work we did in camp with concrete, making concrete. What we did with it, I don’t remember. This is the picture I like the best. That’s me cutting up the log after the tree had been felled. His name I still remember—Heinz, from upstate New York. That’s about all I remember. I guess they were leading, but I...I know what this was. In September, after that six months someone decided to go home. This is at the MacDonald Creek. More of the work crew here. The camp in the background...The picture—I just cannot locate...Here are the barracks. (looks through pictures)

Here’s a picture of life at camp. I’m reading on my sack, my cot. Reading The Sporting News. This fellow’s doing some ironing. I had this taken on my Kodak Brownie. This is me in the middle of some pictures of the camp. Where the hell...This is the one. This picture—see this picture? See these guys squaring off over here? This is what we used to call “grab-assing”. There was a lot of that kind of horseplay. You probably know that young animals, when they’re growing up, the siblings scrap with one another. It’s part of the growing up, but also, according to the wild life types, to prepare them for what things will be really like in the real world. That was an element in the camp that we’d horse around in that fashion. Rough house. Not all of us, but some. That is what this picture shows. That’s how I interpreted this picture. I didn’t realize it at the time. Out of the clear sky, someone would start to spar. They wouldn’t hit each other hard, but that’s the way they played. Fooling around.

MR: This picture right here of...this is GNP 15 from what I’ve seen of the park and these are all tents.

BA: It was originally a tent camp, but long before we had gotten there. I forget when the barracks were put up, but I guess they go back fairly early. This is probably 1933 or 4 or

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thereabout. Incidentally, at the superintendent’s lawn party, there was a fellow who was in the
camps on the east side of the park, Mike Sherman in 1937. He too came back.

You have to take care of these with your life, if you want to see them overnight. If you have any
questions about them...

MR: I would feel more comfortable leaving them with you, just in case something happened. I
realize how important...

BA: I don’t know important this is to your thesis for any elaboration or detail or whatever. This
has work scenes, camp scenes, camp mates, baseball shots. This one—scenes of Belton. This is
mainly of the camp sites. I wasn’t much of a photographer and I didn’t take all those pictures. I
must have gotten some that someone else had taken.

MR: That was one of those square—

BA: Rectangular Kodak Brownies. On my trip to Butte, I took a borrowed...I borrowed a camera
because it was smaller than my Kodak Brownie. I didn’t want to lug that big Brownie. Those
shots are not bad, actually. Photographically.

MR: No.

BA: Apart from the content. The content’s not so good on most of them. Do you see how well
they’ve stood up because of the processing?

MR: Very well.

BA: Let me show you (looks through a cabinet) pictures of a famous actor. I don’t know what
the park’s going to do with that, but I feel like they’re going to publicize that in some way. This
is me...it was taken...Here he is when he was probably 17 and a half—my age—or 18. Here he is
again. I don’t know if you’d ever recognize as the now famous actor Walter Matthau. There he
is. This is in Butte.

MR: I recognize this one.

BA: You recognize him?

MR: Yes, I would.

BA: These are scenes on route to Butte, in Butte, and possibly also Helena.

MR: That’s great!
BA: These are historical. I let the library have it, and they photographed it. So they now have a negative. I asked them for copies of the prints. I don’t know if they blew it up or not and how it will show. I may myself try to photograph these, get negatives, and see what I can do. I’ve done a little darkroom work. Not very much.

MR: Was he at Glacier?

BA: This may interest you. I believe in order to maintain the complement...They never did reach him—the service or whoever. The CCC organization in Washington referred to periods as six months. After three months they would bring in recruits, new ones. He came in July, I think. We got there in April. Sometime, beginning of July, they would bring in a complement to try to bring the camp up to strength. He was there from July, I think, to December. I think six months was enough for him as it was for a number. Some didn’t cotton to this.

MR: I’m sure.

BA: From the city. Some did, some didn’t. My guess now that I think of it—I haven’t really given it much thought—what I would call the country boys, the rural types, adapted much more readily than the city boys did to this. As I said, the harsh weather, I’m certain, had something to do with it.

MR: There are many native Montanans, my Dad included, who have moved. He’s moved to San Francisco because of the winters.

BA: I believe it. I know that people from Minnesota and the Dakotas, they call them snow birds. They go down to Florida. After they are through with their working lives, they retire down to Florida. They’ve had enough of this cold weather.

MR: I believe it.

BA: They seem to locate on the gulf side of the state of Florida. So I’ve been told.

MR: Let’s see.

BA: These summers, you just cannot beat them.

MR: This has been a nice summer. Usually it’s very dry. Very dry. The past couple summers...we’ve had probably three times as much rain this summer as we had in the past three or four years. Missoula—the entire mountain next to the University [of Montana], with the M on it, that burned two summers ago.

BA: It did?
MR: It was just completely dry. There was no rain from March to late August.

BA: Not a fire, but just burned up from the heat?

MR: No. Fire.

BA: Nobody to stop it.

MR: It was started by an employee of the Forest Service. Somebody called him and said, “We need a prescribed burn. We want you to go by the University at such and such a spot and start the fire. The fire crews will be there very shortly.”

He went and started his prescribed burn. He did it in the middle of the day because he was supposed to do it. Stupid for not getting authorization, calling somebody to make sure. He started it and waited. No fire crews came.

BA: What’s a prescribed burn?

MR: When an area is overgrown or many pine trees need fire for their cones to open. I think this case it was an area that was a real fire hazard that they wanted to burn it before it got too bad. They’ll keep fire crews on it.

BA: It’s a prophylactic measure.

MR: Exactly. That’s what this was. This was a prescribed burn to prevent a conflagration. No fire crew showed up. They learned later that someone angry at him called him and pretended to be a superior.

BA: For Christ’s sake.

MR: So he was let off the hook of being responsible. That started a program here where if you’re responsible, if your campfire turns into a forest, you foot the entire bill for hiring...In other words, you pay the salary of all the fire fighters for that day, which can amount to thousands and thousands of dollars.

BA: You know anything about Montana law? We kids, as I’ve said somewhere, we used to...the great legal minds that we were, we had the impression that the state of Montana could stop a train, an interstate train, and commandeer the people to fight fire. I can remember that rumor around the camp. That’s not so, I presume.

MR: I don’t believe so.

BA: I may have mentioned that earlier. We kids took that as gospel.
MR: Still today, whenever you enter a national forest, you have to take along a shovel, an axe, and a bucket.

BA: But not in a national park.

MR: Not in a national park, but in a national forest.

BA: The idea being that you’re going to light a fire.

MR: In a national forest, you will be available to fight a fire—

[End of Interview]