

Interview
with
JOHN LAMBERT

December 5, 1994

Interviewer: Ken Steeber
Transcribed by: Joy K. Stiles

Shenandoah National Park
Luray, Virginia

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Side A:

John Lambert is a former Civilian Conservation Corps enrollee stationed in Shenandoah National Park from April, 1934 until 1937. Assigned to Company 334, Camp NP-1, Skyland, Lambert first describes daily life in the camp. He talks about morning routines, camp food, keeping the barracks clean, and how laundry was handled. Lambert first worked with a crew that built the trail from Panorama up to the summit of Mary's Rock. He then became a truck driver, taking work crews to and from their work sites. He briefly describes his limited contact with mountain residents. Lambert talks about the different sports available during the boys' free time and tells of going to neighboring towns to see movies.

Side B:

Lambert's first job after leaving the CCC was serving as a driver for Addie Nairn Pollock, wife of George Freeman Pollock, the founder of Skyland Resort. Lambert drove Mrs. Pollock from Washington, D.C. to Massanutten Lodge at Skyland in April of 1937 and was her driver for the summer, taking her out and around almost every day. He brought her back to Washington when the weather turned colder and was her driver in Washington. Later, Lambert was drafted into the Army, serving in the infantry and was wounded in the Normandy invasion and again when Allied troops entered Germany.

Lambert chose to retire to Luray because of his enjoyable experiences in the CCC.

End of interview.

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START SIDE A

Ken Steeber: The following interview was conducted on behalf of the oral history program of Shenandoah National Park. The interviewee is John Lambert. The interviewer is Ken Steeber. The interview took place at the Shenandoah National Park Archives in Luray, Virginia on Monday, the 5th of December, 1994, at 10:30 am. With us is Hal Slover, Volunteer in the Park.

John served in the CCC in Shenandoah National Park from April, 1934 to 1937. Much of the human history of the CCC exists in the memories of those who served. John has graciously agreed to share his CCC experience with us today. John, where do you live? What's your address?

John Lambert: I live in Luray, Luray, Route 1, Box 345, Luray, Virginia.

KS: Okay, when were you born, John?

JL: July the 18th, 1912.

KS: Where were you living when you signed up for the CCC?

JL: In Tazewell County, Virginia.

KS: And who were you living with at that time?

JL: I lived with my sister.

KS: Did you have any brothers and sisters?

JL: Yes.

KS: How many brothers did you have, John?

JL: I have, I had three brothers and five sisters.

KS: How did you find out about the CCC?

JL: Well, there was one very close to where I lived, and a lot of the boys were talking about it through the neighborhood and places. And I decided I'd like to go and try it. At that time there was very little work for a young man my age, around, so, it was something to look forward to, to get out of the country where I lived. It was nothing, it was mostly farm work that you could pick

up and that wasn't very much.

KS: How old were you when you joined?

JL: Well, I was in my early 20's, or maybe not quite 20; I don't remember.

KS: Okay. And you served from 1934 to 1937?

JL: Yes.

KS: How many re-enlistments were that?

JL: That was about two. Two or . . . I think there was supposed to be a year . . . and three. They kept holding me on, and I wanted to stay, so that helped .

KS: What was the last year of school that you attended?

JL: Sixth grade.

KS: What camp did they assign you to?

JL: 334.

KS: 334, that's Camp 1--

JL: Camp 1.

KS: --at Skyland.

JL: Skyland.

KS: Okay. Now, this is, this is, we ask you and you use as much time as you want. Can you tell us, in as much detail as you can, the daily camp routine? For example, when you, you, you know, when you woke up, and what your barrack duties were, and your eating times, and your non-work responsibilities.

JL: Well, for getting up, we had reveille every morning and we did count, you know, and you were present and the ones that wasn't they was reported.

KS: What time was that, John?

JL: I think it was around 6:00.

KS: 6:00.

JL: Six, it was, you know, I think around 6:00. And then we went back in and got ready for breakfast, shortly like that, after that. We had breakfast around seven, I think. And then we got ready to go to the field, wherever we were working.

KS: Now, did you have to fix up your bunks, like they did in the army?

JL: Oh, yeah, yes.

KS: And were they inspected before?

JL: Yeah, inspected every day. And if you, everything had to be spick-and-span, the same, just like in the army. Then you went out in the field where it was different, you wasn't, you wasn't a soldier anymore when you got out in the field, out in the woods or wherever you was working.

KS: You were a worker, then?

JL: Yeah.

KS: Were there many disciplinary problems in the CCC camps?

JL: Not very many, none that I know of. Oh, some of the boys might get too much of the mountain dew, but I, I didn't bother with them. I had other things to do.

KS: Well, if you had disciplinary problems, who handled them?

JL: The army, mostly.

KS: The army?

JL: Yes.

KS: Were they regular army, or were they reservists?

JL: Regular army.

KS: Regular army. Who prepared the food?

JL: We had, we had cooks, you know, selected. They were, went to school, I guess, to learn to cook. Or some of them, I imagine, had a little bit of it, anyhow. They served pretty good food.

KS: What were some of the typical meals that you would have? Like for breakfast and lunch and dinner time?

JL: Oh, we'd usually have a regular breakfast, just cereal and orange or apple. And then your bacon and eggs, or whatever.

KS: Did you return from your work in the field to eat, or did you carry lunches with you?

JL: Well, sometimes, they, we would come in, but most of the time we had a chow truck. And they'd bring it to us, and serve it right out of the pots, you know, regular pots that they had to carry it in. It was all pretty good.

KS: The last meal of the day, some time people call it dinner and some time people call it supper. But when was that, generally speaking, what time of the day was that?

JL: At noon.

KS: At noon.

JL: At noon, they'd bring it. Sometimes there'd be places we'd get, that a chow truck wouldn't come, and we'd take our own food with us. And we'd have sandwiches and then we'd have a--if it was in the winter time, we'd have a nice fire, you know, campfire, and then we would take what we wanted, like if we had hot dogs, we'd put them on a stick and roast them over the fire. And toast, the same way. We had, it was very, just like camping out.

KS: At the last meal of the day that you had, did you have to dress for that, or did you eat in your, you know, your work clothes.

JL: Well, in the evenings, we'd have to change into our regular army uniforms or whatever it is, called it. But in the morning, you had your breakfast in your work clothes, you know. You'd eat and then you'd go out to work.

KS: How was laundry handled? Who, who washed all the clothes?

JL: Well, you did some of it yourself, if you wanted to. But they, we had laundry, from Luray, would come up and pick up laundry for us. We, when you had laundry to go, then you'd take

it to the supply sergeant and he handled all of that. He tagged it and sent it out on the truck, they'd take it.

KS: Did you have to pay for that yourself?

JL: Yes.

KS: Now you, you made \$5 a month and \$25 had to be sent home, correct?

JL: Right.

KS: How much did you have to pay for your laundry? I mean, you only made \$5.

JL: Well, it was for, it wasn't too bad. I don't remember what it was, but, usually you had, in the winter time you had your woolen things dry cleaned and summer time it was just regular washed, and ironed, and shirts and pants, you know, just like . . . usually I did most of my, well, I did all of my underwear, I'd wash them myself.

KS: Who was responsible for camp maintenance, like for example, the physical parts of the camp: doors and walls and steps, if they needed repair?

JL: Well, we had a carpenter, a guy who did that.

KS: Was he an enrollee also?

JL: Yes. He was a local man, though. They called them, they had a lot of old men working with us, like a lot of people from around Luray, here, they were, they lived up there just like one of us, but they were in CCC's because I guess they felt that the older people would teach us how to do certain things. How to handle this and handle that, and all. They had had more experience than what we did. That, that's what brought me back to Luray, because they was a lot of people in the camp up there lived down here and they were very good friends of mine, I liked them very much. So when I retired, this is where I ended up.

KS: How about the cleanliness of the camp? Who kept it clean?

JL: We did.

KS: You had to do that.

JL: We did. We kept the floors, we mopped the floors, I don't remember, we didn't do it every day, but we mopped the floors and we kept, had to sweep it out, we, we used wood at that time to heat the barracks. You know, when you got a lot of wood, and we burned a lot of it, it kind of got dirty in there, dirt's in the wood, and we'd track it in from outside, so.

KS: Were there any rivalries between the camps? A lot of times, you know, "our camp is better than your camp" type of thinking goes in there.

JL: Well, sometimes you'd get in arguments, you'd have a few words, you know. We always thought our camp was the best, naturally.

KS: Now, did you have a nickname when you were in camp? No?

JL: No, just, just Lambert. Some called me John, and some would just say Lambert, just like the army, you know. You never had your first name in the army, so . . .

KS: Were religious services offered in the camp?

JL: Oh, yeah.

KS: And who conducted those?

JL: We had a chaplain, army chaplain would come. And we had a rec, rec hall and we had services in them.

KS: In your opinion, now, what were some of the hardships of living in the camp?

JL: I don't know, I didn't have any hardships. I was very comfortable and satisfied with everything. I really enjoyed it.

KS: Did you attend any of the educational classes while you were in the CCC's?

JL: No.

KS: What kind of medical services were available?

JL: We had a dispensary, you know, where you could go for a cold or whatever. If you had a temperature, we, they'd keep you there in the dispensary, they had facilities, you know, bed and everything, look after you for a day or two. But if it was serious, they sent you to Walter Reed.

KS: How about dental services? Were they available too?

JL: No. But if you really had to have it done, or one pulled, they sent you to a dentist in town or Harrisonburg.

KS: What part of camp life did you enjoy the most?

JL: Well, that's kind of hard to say, I enjoyed all of it.

KS: Well, that's enough to say!

JL: That's true. My mother died when I was about eight years old and I just lived with whoever I could, until then, mostly most of my sisters. So, I got out on my own after, the CCC's got me out on my own.

KS: Now also talk about, we're going to talk about the work that you did. What was your first job assignment?

JL: Helping build the trail from Marys Rock to, or Panorama to Marys Rock. I was in on that. I worked on it until we got to the, above the tunnel. And then I got a job driving a truck after that, one of the trucks to haul with, the boys to work and back. Back and forth to work.

KS: Were you trained for any job specialties?

JL: No.

KS: Truck driving.

JL: Just the truck driving.

KS: What kinds of tools did you use in your work, on building the trails?

JL: Well, it was mostly shovel and pick, you know, and wheel barrows. Haul the rocks and stuff, you know, to fill in, stuff like that. Hammers for breaking big rocks, breaking some.

KS: Ever use any dynamite to build the trails, loosen the rock?

JL: No, not that I know of. They might have used it later, but as far as I went with, on the trail, we hadn't, we'd avoided big rocks, just go around them.

KS: Just follow contours of the land.

JL: Yeah.

KS: Now, after a lifetime of employment, how would you rate the quality of work performed by the CCC?

JL: Is what?

KS: The quality of work that the CCC did.

JL: I think they did a good job.

KS: How would you rate the supervision that you received?

JL: Good.

KS: Were, they were local men, most of the supervisors, weren't they?

JL: Yes.

KS: Now, are these the people that you became friendly with, that prompted you to retire back here in Luray?

JL: Umm hmm.

KS: How about the jobs, were they well planned?

JL: Oh, I guess they were because seems like everything went by the plan and was very satisfactory, I guess.

KS: No, do you remember what your first impressions of the Park was?

JL: Well, I'd lived in the mountains, mountain country down in Tazewell, Virginia. It wasn't too much of a change for me, because I had lived close to the mountains all my life, and in the mountains, so, it was almost like home. It was home.

KS: Now, the people that you met, who you, can you name one or two personalities, from that time, who stand out, that you really remember well? . . . Either friends or officers in the army?

JL: The superintendent of the camp was Mr. Noyes [Elmer]. Mr. Brown, he was one of the leaders, you know. And a Mr. Tarbell. Oh, they changed them around, () they, they were permanent, most, a lot of them, some of them. I mean, the ones that I mentioned, they were

permanent there, they stayed there all the time, but some of them would come in and then they'd be transferred to another camp or somewhere else.

KS: The, any of the officers have their families with them?

JL: Oh, I can't yes or no but some of them must have lived close by because I have seen their wives or somebody up there at times.

KS: How about tourists? While the CCC's were here, did you have much tourist traffic?

JL: Well, it was, see, they didn't open it up to tourists, it might have been a year or so after I went there. But when they did open it up, we had quite a lot of tourists come by.

KS: Who were some of the mountain residents that you had contact with?

JL: Well, it was, I can say I didn't, I didn't have much contact with them. There was two families lived close to the camp. One of them was Taylor, and Parks, and then one named Dodson.

KS: What were your first impressions of them?

JL: Well, they were rough-looking, but they were good people. If they liked you, they'd do anything for you. But if they didn't like you, you'd better stay out of their way.

KS: Now, after you got to know them, how did you feel about them?

JL: I liked them really well.

KS: And how were you treated by the mountain people?

JL: I had no trouble at all, with any of them.

KS: What do you remember about the animal life when you first got to the Park?

JL: Very few, a squirrel or some rabbit, or something like that.

KS: How about deer or bear or anything like that?

JL: No.

KS: Did any of the fellows have camp pets that, that they kept?

JL: No.

KS: What kind of plant life did you see in the park, like, what kind of trees and

wildflowers and berries and etcetera, that you remember?

JL: Oh, I remember the chestnut, they were all dead. You could see them all over the, well, a lot of that part () there would probably be a lot of chestnut dead in there. And that, that's one thing that a lot of the CC's did, is cut those trees down. They cut them down, you know, and they just laid there, then. I guess they didn't like the looks of the dead trees in there, so they, we cut them down.

KS: What did they use the wood for? Just let them lay, or did they use them for--

JL: Well, we used a lot of them for fuel, you know, to heat the barracks.

KS: How did chestnut burn? It was a very hard wood.

JL: It, it wasn't bad. It burnt very fast. It was dry, you know, and it's not a real hard wood, either, it's . . . it was, it was nice to have, it wasn't too heavy and all that stuff, because, I know I was never on very many wood details but you could get it by the armload, you carried it in, put it in the stove.

KS: Who tended the stoves in the winter time?

JL: Well, it was really the, well, all of us did, in a way, but one guy, we paid him so much to keep the fire, to put wood in and keep the fire. I think most of the other barracks did the same thing.

KS: Oh, on your own you hired somebody?

JL: Yeah.

KS: Interesting.

JL: One of the boys, it was one of the boys that slept in the barracks that you were in.

KS: If you visited the Park recently, how does it compare to your first visit?

JL: It is very different. Of course, I go up there all the time, most of all the, Al and I go up there a whole lot.

KS: There's a question that comes up periodically on whether or not the Park was really

as bare of, devoid of trees and plants, in those days as it is now. Was the land used pretty hard?

JL: The what?

KS: The land, was it used pretty hard, you know, for lumbering and farming?

JL: Yeah. They, chestnut was a very popular wood for people back then. They made fence rails, and made houses out of them, it was good, solid lumber.

KS: What was the weather like?

JL: Well, it was nice, I thought, all the time. Even, we, we got snowed in a time or two, but it didn't last too long.

KS: I'd like to go now to recreation in the camps. What recreation opportunities were available in the camps?

JL: Oh, we had football, basketball, tennis, badminton, and baseball . . .

KS: Did you play on any of the teams?

JL: I went out for football, but it was too rough for me.

KS: Boys were pretty big?

JL: Yeah. (laughter) Especially the Captain, I remember one captain they had, Captain Grovermont I think his name was. He was coach, and he won, he, I can't, I'm not very much at sports anyhow. He says come on, hit me! Don't, don't be afraid of me! Run, see how hard you can bump him, you know. And some way I hit him and it hurt me worse than it did him. So I told him I wasn't going to () (laughing)

KS: How good were the teams?

JL: Beg your pardon?

KS: How good were the teams?

JL: Oh, I guess they were very good, because they played the different camps, you know, and some of the local towns around.

KS: What other games did the enrollees engage in, like board games, or cards, or darts, or

things like that? Were there many of those types of games?

JL: Oh, once in a while you'd see a crap game, or card game, you know, on payday, but other, I don't know, I didn't do any of it, so . . .

KS: Now, did you have many opportunities to go into any of the valley communities, like Luray or Stanley or Sperryville?

JL: Oh, yeah, we, if there was a movie in town here that anybody wanted to see, it was a good movie, or if you could get enough to go, like a truckload, we could get transportation to town ()

KS: Did they have any other recreational programs, other than the movies? In town?

JL: In camp?

KS: No, in town. Like in Luray or Stanley.

JL: Yeah, they had movies in Luray, but not in Stanley. They had a movie hall in Luray.

KS: How about bowling, did they have bowling or anything like that?

JL: I don't think they had bowling there.

KS: So it was pretty much confined to movies.

JL: Yeah.

KS: Now, did you date any local girls?

JL: No.

KS: Okay. And how often were you allowed to go home, on furlough?

JL: Well, I guess you could go most any time you could get leave, over a weekend, you know, or, if you're close enough you could go in any time you wanted to. Over the weekend, but I lived too far away so I didn't get home too often.

KS: Okay. Please advance the tape and then turn over.

END SIDE A

BEGIN SIDE B

KS: What did you do after you left the CCC?

JL: I, first job I had was driving for Mrs. Pollock. You know, you've heard of George Freeman?

KS: Oh, yes. You drove for his wife?

JL: Yes.

KS: Is this when she lived in Washington?

JL: Yes. She, I left camp in April of '37 and then the first job I went to Washington and drove her to Skyland, to Massanutten Cabin. And she had a 1937 Buick, brand new, and I drove for her all summer and when it got cold, we went to Washington.

KS: What kind of person was she?

JL: Well, she was, it's kind of hard to say, she was nice to me, but . . . I guess she's just a normal woman.

KS: The picture we get out of her comes from George's book, *Skyland*. Would you consider her a strong woman?

JL: What do you mean?

KS: As in, far as personality and conducting her business affairs and things?

JL: Yeah, yeah. She, I know she paid me \$50 a month and my room and board and a uniform. That was a lot of money, then.

KS: Did you, did she use your services a lot? Going back and forth or around the area, as far as, you know, driving her?

JL: Driving her, yes. We, she usually would have a, take a drive about every day, especially when we were up here on the mountain. And outside of that, I'd park the car and I was free 'til the next morning.

KS: Now, how about George, was she married to George at this time?

JL: Yes.

KS: And they lived at Massanutten Lodge?

JL: No, he lived, he had a building right in back of her lodge, you can see--

KS: John is pointing to a picture of the Skyland area.

JL: And I had a little cabin, kind of a, oh, it's about the size of this room, with a roof over it, and a door and a win--one window. It was roughly built, you know, mostly what most of them in up there were built. And Mr. Pollock, he lived in his house and she lived in Massanutten Lodge. They didn't live, they didn't sleep in the same house. But in Washington it was different, you know. He had his things in his house that he wanted and she had hers. So, that's the way they lived up there.

KS: Now, in Washington, did they share the same house there?

JL: Oh, yes.

KS: Was it a nice home?

JL: Oh, yes. I have a picture of it at home somewhere, I'll get it done up.

KS: Oh, that would be fine, that would be fine. Now, what kind of career have you had since the CCC days and, of course, being a driver for Mrs. Pollock?

JL: Well, that wasn't my kind of a life that I wanted to live, so I didn't drive for her but a, about a year and a half. Then I just worked local, anything I could get to do around Washington. And I was drafted in the army. And three years, seven months and three days.

KS: What unit?

JL: Infantry.

KS: Infantry. What division?

JL: Fourth.

KS: Was that Pacific? Or was that Europe?

JL: It was Europe. Went to England in forty . . . '44 or '45. I don't remember.

Hal Slover: Forty, forty-four, John, you, you took part in the invasion, that was forty-four.

JL: Yeah, '45 I was in Normandy and the invasion of France.

KS: Normandy invasion?

JL: Umm hmm. And got hit the next day, went back to England and the hospital. And then I got back with my outfit in July, August . . . helped, was in the invasion of Paris, on through Paris and, you know, into, through Brussels, into Germany and got hit again. I came back, down in the Normandy area, down there, into the hospital down in there. And then they never sent me back to the front lines any more after that. I stayed in the rear until the war was over.

KS: Looking back, what do you think of your CCC experiences now?

JL: Boy, I wish I could go through it again!

KS: That good?

JL: That good.

KS: Well, John, I want to thank you very much for sharing your experiences with us. And I hope, in the future, as people listen to this, they'll gain as much from it as I have. Thank you very much.

JL: You're--

END OF INTERVIEW