

980-1-4

# EDWARD SEKERMESTROVICH

Life at CCC Camp Arboretum  
Benton County, Oregon: 1935-1940

1980 Oral History Interview by  
Royal G. Jackson and Karen Thomas



Soap Creek Valley History Project  
OSU Research Forests  
Monograph #4



# **EDWARD SEKERMESTROVICH**

**LIFE AT CCC CAMP ARBORETUM  
BENTON COUNTY, OREGON: 1935-1940**

**1980 Oral History Interview by**

**Royal G. Jackson and Karen Thomas**

**Soap Creek Valley History Project  
Monograph #4**

**Bob Zybach, Series Editor**

**OSU RESEARCH FORESTS  
Oregon State University  
1991**

## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

The Soap Creek Valley History Project was authorized by, and is under the direction of, Dr. William Atkinson, Director of the OSU Research Forests. Funding for the project is provided by the OSU College of Forestry.

Oral history research and transcription for the project have been performed with the assistance and cooperation of the OSU Horner Museum. The Edward Sekermestrovich interview was researched and transcribed under the supervision of Jennifer Lee, the Museum's Oral Historian.

Transcription to computer files was done by Bonnie Humphrey-Anderson of the Horner Museum staff. Lisa Buschman, OSU Research Forests secretary, assisted in the final editing, formatting, and indexing.

Ida May Warner Sekermestrovich wrote a biographical sketch of her husband for this project. It is printed as the appendix to the interview.

Cover Photo: This photograph of an early OSC School of Forestry work crew is from Royal Jackson's personal photograph collection. It was first used for the cover of his 1980 book, McDonald-Dunn Forests: Human Use and Occupation.





CCC Company 3503, Camp Arboretum, December, 1938

## TABLE OF CONTENTS

|  |    |
|--|----|
| Soap Creek Valley History Project . . . . .      | i  |
| Introduction to Edward Sekermestrovich . . . . . | ii |
| <b>Interview</b>                                 |    |
| 1. Arriving at Camp Arboretum . . . . .          | 1  |
| 2. CCC Camp Fairlawn . . . . .                   | 1  |
| 3. Coming to Oregon . . . . .                    | 2  |
| 4. Camp Discharge . . . . .                      | 3  |
| 5. A Train Load of 3-C Boys . . . . .            | 4  |
| 6. Camp Activities . . . . .                     | 7  |
| 7. Corvallis . . . . .                           | 9  |
| 8. Camp Clothes and Cars . . . . .               | 12 |
| 9. Camp Jobs . . . . .                           | 13 |
| 10. Poison Oak . . . . .                         | 16 |
| 11. Daily Life . . . . .                         | 17 |
| 12. Political Discussions . . . . .              | 21 |
| 13. Calloway Creek Dam . . . . .                 | 21 |
| 14. Driving Accident Stories . . . . .           | 23 |
| 15. Oregon Forest Nursery . . . . .              | 25 |
| 16. Camp Buildings . . . . .                     | 26 |
| 17. Love at First Sight . . . . .                | 27 |
| 18. Marys Peak Side Camp . . . . .               | 28 |
| 19. Civilian Life . . . . .                      | 29 |
| 20. The Great Depression . . . . .               | 31 |
| 21. Return Visits . . . . .                      | 33 |
| 22. The Sign Shop . . . . .                      | 34 |
| <b>Appendix</b>                                  |    |
| Biographical Sketch . . . . .                    | 36 |
| <b>Index</b> . . . . .                           | 38 |

## THE SOAP CREEK VALLEY HISTORY PROJECT

The Soap Creek Valley History Project was undertaken by the Oregon State University's Research Forests in 1989 for the purpose of better understanding the history, ecology, and culture of an area that has been directly impacted by OSU land management practices for over sixty years. An important part of the project has been the locating of recorded interviews with individuals who have had an influence upon the valley's history. Additional recordings have also been made with significant individuals who have not been previously consulted, as well as "follow-up" interviews with a few people who have continued to contribute to our understanding of the Soap Creek area.

The publication of these interviews as a series of cross-referenced monographs has been undertaken in an effort to make them available to resource managers, researchers and educators. It will also provide accurate and accessible references for a planned written history of the Soap Creek Valley, a primary objective of this research.

One of the basic accomplishments of the project has been the creation of a computerized concordance file. This was made possible through the assistance and expertise of Bonnie Humphrey-Anderson, of the Horner Museum staff, and Lisa Buschman, secretary for the OSU Research Forests. This file allows for both the efficient and systematic indexing of the monographs in this series, as well as providing a method for cross-referencing other research materials being used in the construction of a scholarly history of the Soap Creek Valley. Wherever possible, that history is being assembled from the written and spoken words of the people who made it and lived it. The use of the concordance file allows information from the journal entries of botanist David Douglas, the transcribed words of Kalapuyan William Hartless, the spoken memories of pioneer "Grandma" Carter, and the recollections of "3-C Boy" Edward Sekermestrovich -- a history spanning over a century and a half -- to be systematically searched and organized as if they were all products of the same pen (or word processor).

Citations should mention both the Horner Museum and OSU Research Forests.

## INTRODUCTION TO EDWARD SEKERMESTROVICH INTERVIEW

The following interview with Edward Sekermestrovich took place in Corvallis, Oregon on February 6, 1980. It was recorded under the direction of Dr. Royal Jackson of the OSU College of Forestry, assisted by Karen Thomas, a graduate student doing her thesis on the history of CCC (Civilian Conservation Corps) Camp Arboretum. For those readers interested in obtaining more information regarding the CCC's or the history of Peavy Arboretum, please refer to Jackson's 1980 McDonald-Dunn Forests: Human Use and Occupation, or Thomas' Camp Arboretum: The Dynamics of the Civilian Conservation Corps in McDonald Forest and Surrounding Areas. A brief summary of CCC history at Peavy Arboretum was also recently printed by OSU Research Forests under the title, "Welcome to Camp Arboretum."

Funding for this interview was initially provided by the OSU College of Forestry. In addition to Jackson's and Thomas' work, Mr. Sekermestrovich's contributions were made part of Horner Museum's Oral History Program: "Oregon State University and Its Effect on the Larger Community." The stated goal for Horner's program "is to document, through oral sources, the role the University's diverse programs have played in the social, economic, and political life of the state and region."

Edward and Ida Sekermestrovich have been married for nearly 50 years. For most of that time they have resided in the same house in which their 5 children were raised. Today they share their home with photographs of their eight grandchildren, momentos from a long and memory-filled career, and an extensive doll collection. Edward's ("Eddie" to his wife) gruff countenance and abrupt answers quickly become apparent as the manifestations of a happy man with a dry sense of humor; an important point to keep in mind when reviewing this interview. The absence of vocal inflections, facial expressions (especially poker-faced "expressions"), and hand gestures greatly reduces the humor in many of Mr. Sekermestrovich's replies. Certain types of research will require listening to the tapes on file with Horner Museum, or meeting personally with the Sekermestroviches, should the opportunity present itself.

Bob Zybach  
Corvallis, Oregon  
December 18, 1990

# EDWARD SEKERMESTROVICH

Interview conducted February 6, 1980 by Royal Jackson and Karen Thomas.

## 1. Arriving at Camp Arboretum

*Mr. Sekermestrovich, maybe we could start with having you tell us about when you first came to Camp Arboretum and what you remember about that -- your first impression.*

Oh, I remember one Sunday morning about 6:30, I left the train in Albany, came over the bridge -- was raining like the devil -- and I went to a camp. It was a CC Camp 3503, Arboretum, let's see, I'd say nine miles out of Corvallis. Then we had breakfast. Then we got our sheets and our supplies from the supply room, had our bedding, fixed our beds next I guess it was, after we ate, and loafed around all day after that.

*What led up to your coming to Camp Arboretum? How did you find out about the 3-C program?*

Well, times were bad, people didn't have money, and I was the oldest one in the family. I went to camp one time before, that was back in Ohio, and I kind of liked it. There was different things you do back there, different things you learn there, so I went. So that's how I came out here; I signed up for another hitch.

*I see. You'd been in a 3-C camp before?*

## 2. CCC Camp Fairlawn

Yes, Fairlawn was the name of the company.

*Were you originally from Ohio?*

Yes, Akron, Ohio.

*How long were you in that camp in Ohio?*

I don't remember what the enlistment was, if it was a year or a year and a half. But I stayed there the full amount.

*What year was that?*

That was 1935 I think, the first time. Or was it 1936? Have I got a discharge? I don't remember, to tell you the truth on that.



*What kind of camp was that one, Camp Fairlawn?*

Well, at that time it was just -- what would you call it, like now it would be a great, big park. That's all. And it had buildings. And what we did, we made roads and cleaned out the ponds, creeks, and then put rocks on the sides -- embankments on the sides of rivers. That's what we were doing there. I used to drive a car and a truck, things like that.

*So your enlistment ended there in Ohio?*

Yes.

### **3. Coming to Oregon**

*And then you decided to come out to Oregon?*

Well, I loafed around a while and there wasn't any jobs around, so I thought I'd sign up again. Which I did, and I came to Oregon.

*You mean the group you signed up with moved out here?*

No. They broke that up right after that; it was all through. I went back there not too long ago and that's just a great big park now.

*I'm not clear why you came to Oregon. How did it happen that Oregon was your destination?*

I didn't have anything to say about that. I signed up and I came here.

*They just told you to come to Oregon?*

Well, you sign up and they ask you if you want to leave town. And I said, "I don't care." They didn't tell me I was going to Oregon, but I went. I didn't mind it. In fact, it was the best thing that ever happened to me, I thought.

*Were you in the first group then that came to Camp Arboretum?*

Well, I can't say yes or no on that, either. I believe there was somebody before me. I don't know when the camp was built, to tell you the truth. I never did find out.

*I think it was around 1935, wasn't it, Karen?*

*[KAREN] Yes, the first group came in around 1935.*

All right, then, it must have been the first time they ever signed anybody up. Even in Ohio, in 1935.

*[KAREN] Do you remember your company number?*

Yes, 3503.

[KAREN] *That was the third group, and it came into camp December 20, 1937.*

Yes, I came in 1937. I said in 1938, didn't I? I'm mistaken there.

[KAREN] *That was a junior camp.*

#### 4. **Camp Discharge**

*Here we have the discharge from the first camp you were in?*

This is from Camp Arboretum.

*"This is to certify that Edward Sekermestrovich, CC5209381, a member of the Civilian Conservation Corps, was enrolled . . . 1-6-38 at Fort Knox, Kentucky, is hereby discharged therefrom by reason to accept employment. Said Edward Sekermestrovich was born in Detroit, in the state of Michigan. When he enrolled he was 20 years of age and by occupation a laborer. He had brown eyes, brown hair, ruddy complexion, and was five feet seven inches in height." Nothing's changed. "His color was white."*

Yes.

*"Given under my hand at Camp S-220, Oregon, this 23rd day of March, one thousand nine hundred and forty, by George F. Black, CCC Subaltern. Commanding Company 3503 CCC." So you signed up at Camp Fairlawn, did a stint of duty there, that ended.*

That ended.

*Then did you do something in between?*

Well, when was the Lindberg baby kidnapped? I was selling papers then. I think I'd done that before I came here. I really had to, because I was selling papers and magazines and stuff like that, and I was selling extras when the Lindberg baby was kidnapped.

*You remember that?*

I remember that well, but I don't remember the dates on it, what time that was, or what year it was.

*But that was while you were in Ohio?*

Yes, oh, yes. While I was in Ohio.

*Now, did any of your friends sign up with you and come to this camp, Camp Arboretum?*

No, nobody. I was the only one.

*How did you feel about leaving Ohio?*

Well, I didn't know what the heck I was going to run into. And -- how should I say this -- we weren't ever away from home.

*Never had been away from home before?*

No, until I went to the first camp.

*And that's in Ohio.*

That's in Ohio, and that wasn't too bad. We got to come home every Saturday; that was pretty good. But we got here and were a little homesick, you know, at that time. Even as old as I was, it didn't matter.

*What were you, about twenty when you got here?*

**5. A Train Load of 3-C Boys**

I'd say about twenty-one, twenty-two, yes.

*Did you come in by train?*

We came in by train, yes, and got off at the depot in Albany.

*Was there someone there to meet you?*

Oh, yes. They had those trucks you've seen in the picture with the canvas on them. And like I say, it was raining like the devil; we came over the bridge from Albany, coming over north and it says, "Welcome to Friendly City of Albany." We were leaving it, coming to Camp Adair -- well, Camp Arboretum. Camp Adair and Camp Arboretum are getting mixed up now.

*What month was that? Must have been winter if it was raining?*

Well, you can't never tell here in Oregon. This is my discharge; it'll give you the date; it's right on there. We'll get something right.

*Enrolled January 6, 1938. That's when you were enrolled, so you probably came out here in January.*

It took a week to come out here.

*Did you and all the other 3-C boys travel together, or were you by yourself?*

We made a train load as we came to town. We left Akron, Ohio, and we stopped along the way, like Chicago or Indiana.

*Now, was this a train of just the 3-C boys? Or was it a train that other people rode?*

Oh, other people were on it, but we were like -- like three cars, or two cars, and then a diner, and everything else, because we eat the same way they did, the other people.

*What do you remember about that trip? Did you get to know some people on that trip?*

No, I didn't know anybody. We just worried about where we were going at that time.

*A lot of speculation going on?*

Yes, and what we ate on the train, and stuff like that; that's all we talked about. And we never even knew we were coming to Oregon, to tell you the truth, until I stopped here.

*Oh, you didn't know your destination?*

Oh, no, they don't tell you nothing.

*You just knew you were coming west?*

Yes, we were coming west someplace. We didn't know, until we hit Albany, then we thought: "Yep, we're in Albany. That's our home." It wasn't. Corvallis was.

*About how many boys were on that train, do you remember?*

Well, fifteen to twenty or twenty-three fellows would be in the back end of a truck, right? That was a stake bed truck, and I'd say there was five of them, so that would be half a company, let's say it that way.

*That would have been about how many?*

That would be . . . let's see, five of them would be 120 guys or something like that.

*It took you about a week to come out here with 120 guys?*

With 120 fellows, yes.

*You got to Albany and got out and there were trucks there to meet you.*

To meet us, yes. And then we got in them -- well, they had roll call first, in front of the train, you know.

*Was the military in charge at that point, or was it still civilian?*

There was a commander. He came from this camp, I believe. I'll say it that way because he was there after we parked at Camp Arboretum.

*Do you remember his name? The commander?*

Yes, A.B. Woodley. He was a lieutenant for a while; then he became captain before I left. He was an infantry officer of some kind, 22nd or . . .

*Did he address the group then?*

Yes, and tell you welcome you're here.

*This fellow with the mustache?*

Right here [pointing to Woodley in 1938 CCC Camp Arboretum Group Photo].

*Was he in uniform when he met you?*

That's right, had a little stick, and he's got a dog, he took with him all over.

*Looks like a Doberman Pinscher.*

It was.

*Vern McDaniel used to complain about that dog getting over into the nursery.*

Yes, I know.

*So he gave you an address and said, "Welcome to Camp Arboretum," and loaded you into trucks.*

Yes, that's right.

*And then in the rain drove you to the Arboretum.*

Peavy Arboretum, yes.

*And when you first got there, there were buildings there?*

The buildings were there, yes.

*Barracks?*

Barracks. And then we drove up in front, five trucks. One would go the way over there and the other would follow it up, and then we'd all start getting out.

*Did you have duffel bags, or what did you have your possessions in?*

We had duffel bags.

*But not military uniform?*

No, just civilian clothes.

*You got there and unloaded and got assigned a bunk?*

Yes. Bedding. You had to go check out your bedding, and everything, put your beds up. And like I said, we went to eat after we had everything all fixed up, and then we loafed for the rest of the day, or slept, either way you want to do it. A lot



of guys slept, but we were just tired.

*After that long trip?*

Yes.

## **6. Camp Activities**

*What were the first kind of activities you were involved in?*

Well, they took you around the camp and showed you the camp and told you -- and asked you if you wanted to be a truck driver, or what can you do. So we had to go into the office, and they took us all in what they called the rec hall. That's where they asked what you could do. And you told them. And then the fellows, some of them just fought fires, some of them made roads, some of them were drivers, some went to mechanic school -- we had a little school there.

*Were you given a choice from among these options?*

Yes, I chose every time I wanted something.

*What did you choose?*

Well, I started out to drive one of them Forest Service [State Forestry Department] trucks. And we used to have to take a bunch in there every morning to Salem, and we'd dig on the capitol.

*The foundation?*

That's right.

*Did you actually dig, or did you just drive truck?*

No! [With Ed's sense of humor, I would guess that he said this word in mock horror at even having to consider digging.] I drove the truck over there with the twenty-five guys in it, and they drove the real trucks, the dump trucks. They'd back in there and the guy would load them up with the shovel. The fellow that was running the shovel, he was a civilian. When we got done with that project, they found something else, forest fire, or something like that.

*To what extent was the military involved in this? Did they have a direct supervisory role over you?*

I don't know where they got their instructions or nothing like that. But, like I said, we went over, twenty-five fellows. I'd drive them over -- that's what I first started to

do -- took them over there to work; and when we got there, we had our own dump truck, but we left them there, and we'd come home at night.

*What would you do all day long?*

I'd loaf or if somebody got sick I'd drive his truck, or I could go right across the street from the penitentiary to where the Forest Service headquarters was.

*State Forestry headquarters?*

State forestry headquarters, and they had a mess hall. That's where we ate. I'd go over there and loaf, or else go in the quarters and just look at magazines or anything like that; or you could walk around town if I wanted to, if I wasn't busy.

*At four o'clock or something like that you'd load them up?*

Well, I'd say about 3:00 p.m. or 3:30 p.m.

*Then what was the routine, you'd go back to camp . . . ?*

Back to camp, you wash yourself, clean up, and eat supper, and then go down to the rec hall and PX and spend your money or do whatever you want to do.

*What kind of things did you do at the rec hall?*

Well, you shot pool, and you had a piano player there -- we had a good one. You played cards if you wanted to. You wasn't supposed to gamble, but you know how that goes. We never gambled. [Laughter]

*Did you get a little poker in there?*

Oh, you shouldn't say that. You're not allowed to say that. [Laughter] Oh, yes, we played poker, and stuff like that. But it was a nice camp, it was very nice. I loved it, I don't care . . .

*If there was still daylight outside when you got in, did you take walks, or do anything outside, or was it all pretty much inside?*

Well, later on we had classes for archery and leather work and I went to Oregon State up here to the engineering building; we had classes there.

*What kind of classes?*

I was taking welding up there.

*Was that during the day or at night?*

At night. Afterwards we'd go up there.

*What were some of the other kinds of classes a person could take?*

Oh, you could take anything you wanted to.

*Were there regular college students in class with you, or were there just 3-C boys in the class?*

It was just 3-C boys, and we had an instructor.

*There were classes just for you guys?*

Yes, just for us fellows. Now whoever signed this certificate here -- Don Malley.

*So you took auto mechanics, and welding, and archery?*

Yes, that's right.

*What would be some of the other kind of things that would be offered? Other type of classes?*

Well, you see that sign up there? You could go out and rout signs like that. We made signs for the Forest Service, too.

*Wood routing?*

Yes.

*You did that on campus, or out at camp?*

We did that out there at the Arboretum.

*How did you get to town? The camp was quite a ways out of town, wasn't it?*

Well, you hitchhiked, or else like me -- now I knew the lady who ran the taxi cab company in Corvallis; she'd take me home once in a while for nothing. [Laughter] And then a lot of times we'd all put in a bunch of money and call a cab; and at that time it didn't cost as much, a dollar and a half, two dollars lots of times to come into town.

## **7. Corvallis**

*What do you remember about Corvallis, what was it like then?*

I'd say it was a pretty nice town. But most of the fellows, I thought, was going to Monmouth or Salem.

*You mean for recreation?*

Yes, for recreation. Most of them would go there.

*What did they do there?*

I really don't know.

*Did they have girl friends over there or something?*

Well, they might have. [Laughter] Quite a few of them went to Albany, too. They like Albany real well.

*Would they go to a roller skating rink, or something like that?*

Roller skating rink, yes. Ice rink here in Corvallis, they came here, too.

*There was an ice skating rink here?*

Oh yes, we had an ice skating rink right over here, where Woodstock's Pizza is located.

*A lot of 3-C boys go there?*

Yes, lots of them. And then we had a roller rink downtown on Third Street. What's that one between where they used to be the Ford Garage? Jackson.

*Oh, that's where you went to go roller skating?*

Yes. Third and Jackson.

*Would a bunch of you get together and go down?*

Well, the company would say: "If a bunch of you want to go tonight, just sign up, and you can go. We'll have a truck for you."

*And you'd drive in there?*

I would drive it in, yes. And if it had more than one truckload, somebody else would drive in; one of the Forest Service drivers would.

*What was it like when you came to town? Did the boys your age that were here in Corvallis resent you in any way?*

Never did, that I knew of. We were all friendly with each other.

*Do you remember any examples of fights that broke out?*

Once in a while. But they weren't bad, for the size of the camp.

*What would the fights occur over?*

Well, one of them would occur quite often, but nobody would get hurt. We had one colored fellow in Corvallis at that time. They kind of didn't think it was right for him to skate with a white woman or something like that, and they might pick a fight with him or something. Then it would get out of hand, you know.

*What was his name, do you remember?*

Bud Smith was his name.

*And he was from Corvallis?*

He was from Corvallis, and he's still here. And then after that it got a lot better -- in this camp we'll say every six months somebody came in new or left; the older fellows knew him, and fights wouldn't happen like it used to.

*You mean you didn't all come in and leave at the same time?*

Oh, no. Going all the time, one way or the other. Some had different jobs to do, see.

*Their jobs would end?*

That's right, then we'd come in. They'd say: "You want to go to town tonight? Put your name on the board here." And if we get enough to go to town or some church meeting, or something like that, they would take a truck load in, and the truck driver would wait on you. It didn't matter what he did after he took you there, just as long as he was back. Or if you went to the skating rink, you could wait when it closed, but we never waited that long. They'd just say, "Be back at 10:00 p.m.," and you're back at 10:00 p.m.

*Was there a curfew? You had to be back by what time?*

Yes, there used to be. We'd say 10:00 p.m., 10:30 p.m.

*And that was during the week?*

Yes, at the end of the week you could stay out all weekend if you wanted to. But you had to have a pass.

*If you had a friend here in town you could come in and stay all night if you wanted to?*

Sometimes. They wouldn't let you do it all the time.

*So they were pretty liberal as far as coming and going?*

They were nice about that, yes; I thought very much so.

*What other things did you do in town? You mentioned skating rinks and going to church.*

Yes.

*What other kind of things did you do in Corvallis?*

Well, you do your shopping and everything here sometimes. Got to buy clothes. After the day shift was over, you could dress up in your civvies if you wanted to; they didn't care.



## 8. Camp Clothes and Cars

*What were your work clothes like? Did they issue you work clothes?*

It was fatigues.

*Army fatigues?*

Well, no, they weren't especially Army. We had a summer uniform and that was just like them light shirts and pants.

*Denim?*

Yes, denim.

*But you did wear a military type uniform?*

We did, yes. For dress up.

*And did you have shoulder patches, insignias and all that kind of thing?*

No. We didn't go for that.

*I noticed a couple of these fellows had stripes on.*

Well, he's a sergeant, an assistant sergeant.

*They're military personnel?*

Yes, they have it, see [pointing to company picture]. And this here is a staff sergeant here, see? The sergeant in the office, he was just like a first sergeant in the Army.

He had his three up and three down, and one in the middle diamond, see?

*Shoulder pads?*

That's right. And then he had assistant leaders. They were like a staff sergeant.

*And you were an assistant leader?*

Yes. I got \$6 more.

*What was the pay in those days?*

Well, it started out \$22. Well, I got a little more than \$6 then, come to think of it.

It was \$22 and I got \$36 when I got assistant leader.

*All of your living expenses were taken care of?*

That's right.

*Did any of the boys have automobiles?*

[Long pause]

*Not supposed to have?*

Well, no.

*Some of them actually did, though?*

Well.

*So there weren't any private vehicles except for the military officers on the base?*

That's right. Ask the officers they had the fancy ones. But they would stay on the base maybe a month at a time, them officers, and then they would take a week off or something; one of them would stay and the other one would take a week off.

*May have been some off the base but it wasn't common practice?*

No, it wasn't common.

*Most of the boys didn't have very much money, I assume? Or they wouldn't have been in the 3-C program?*

That's right.

## **9. Camp Jobs**

*From what kind of background had most of those 3-C boys come -- from cities, or from farms, or what?*

I'd say they were from cities. And some of them were farmers.

*Kind of a mixture, then?*

Yes. Just kids that couldn't get jobs some place else, and wanted to try it. Heck, we had a stone quarry out there, too. We used to dynamite just like the big boys do. We had a crew and it had just a fellow like me; he'd run the doggone dynamiting outfit.

*Was that Bill Rhoads?*

Yes. We'd just blow the rock quarry. We had a rock quarry.

*Where was it located?*

That was located at the Lewisburg and Mountain View Drive. You go north on Highland Way until you come to Lewisburg Avenue and then go down a block and a half, turn right, then turn left on Mountain View Drive one half mile on Mountain View and turn right into the quarry.

*And that stone then was used for roads?*

Roads, paths, and that's all that I know of; and around the camp.

*Did you help do some of that blasting?*

Yes, I went over there, if I didn't have nothing to do that day. I had to go to Portland to get my supplies -- see, you only had one day to get supplies and that was on Thursday. And if somebody got hurt in the vicinity of Alsea, or else Triangle Lake or Mill City, anytime one of them got hurt on the job or something like that, I'd have to go pick him up.

*That's a pretty big area to cover.*

And then I'd take him to the Vancouver Barracks.

*In Portland?*

Yes.

*Now, why were you the one to do that?*

I was hooked with the Army at last.

*Toward the end of your commitment?*

Yes. They put me on an ambulance, and I went to the Presidio and picked up a new one. I had two of them.

*Presidio, California?*

Yes. I drove it back home, right here to Corvallis.

*So Camp Arboretum had its own ambulance?*

Yes, we had our own ambulance.

*Were there that many people that got hurt in the 3-C program?*

Well, we took care of side camps, too; they called them side camps.

*How was a side camp different from Camp Arboretum? Did it have a smaller population?*

Well, they never said that the Alsea Camp was a side camp of ours; they just called it a side camp, and I don't know why. It was a different company altogether.

*Did they have regular buildings like you did?*

Just like we did, yes. They had offices just like we did, and they had mess halls just like we did. I've ate in them; I've slept there if I had to, when I was out of town.

You just go into a supply place and check out a bed and you get to sleep there.

*Then there were a lot of accidents that caused you to drive?*

Well, that's on Forest Service land and Forest Service fires, too. Like we had the Smith River fire, I was out on that fire for two to three weeks, straight, before I came

back to camp. But they'd make the mess lines there and everything; I could sleep in it anytime. And then we had a fire, they called the Gooseneck; that was on the other side of Dallas. Well, that didn't last long; we done that in two to three days. The other fellows came up with trucks. I'd take the ambulance and sit by them unless -- if something happens in the meantime -- nobody's hurt there and a call comes from some place else.

*How did you get the calls?*

I don't know. We didn't have two way radio, but we got them. The officer always knew. They didn't have walkie-talkies and stuff they got today.

*The officer would notify you that there was an accident somewhere?*

A call, yes. And if the fellow was too bad, we could drop him off at any hospital here, but if he could last long enough to get to Vancouver Barracks, we'd take him there.

*What was the typical kind of accident that you mostly dealt with?*

When you cut your hand with an axe, or your foot, or something like that, or back trouble. We'd take them up there. Went on the fires the same way -- if he gets smoked or something like that we tried to take him to the closest town, and if the doctor figures he can go to Vancouver, he tells you, and we take him up.

*Specifically, at Camp Arboretum, what kind of accidents were there that you remember?*

Well, there were some freaky ones once in a while -- just accidents that just happen, and other people make them happen once in a while. But other than that it would be just like anyplace else; when you work in a factory it would be the same way.

*The usual kind, though. Cut hands, cut foot.*

Cut hands, and you'd cut your foot with an axe and you'd chop your shoe off and stuff like that.

*How about the dynamite? Did anyone ever get blown up?*

Never did get hurt. Nobody at all. Never got hit by a rock. Well, we broke some windows one day on a truck. [Laughter] Nobody got hurt. We never carried off dead or anything like that.

## 10. Poison Oak

*So far as you know during your period there, no one ever got killed at Camp Arboretum?*

Ah, no. I think our worst disease now -- most of the customers we had was poison oak.

*Tell me about that.*

You look like a big fellow. Man, when they get poison oak, they just swell up bigger than you.

*Did you ever get poison oak?*

Yes, but I got it between my fingers here and this and that, and they tried everything, and I used what they called GI soap. Why they called it GI soap, I don't know.

They used to give us that soap to wash our laundry if we wanted to wash our own laundry, and it was a kind of yellow soap, and they called it GI soap. I used to just kind of warm it up on the stove, you know, with a little bit of water in it, melt it, and put it in here like this here between my fingers, and heck the poison would go away.

But other people, oh, my God, they would swell -- like that, their fingers would be, so you could tell what the rest of their bodies were like.

*So that was a continuous problem then?*

Yes, poison oak.

*You had your own doctors at Camp Arboretum?*

We had our own doctors.

*How many were there when you were there?*

Well, there was just one all the time.

*Do you remember who it was?*

I don't remember his name, but I could find out for you. I think as long as I was there, there were only two of them there, a short fellow, and a big, tall fellow. But I don't know. I think the tallest fellow was from the side camp of Triangle Lake, used to come over and take this other fellow's place.

*What were the usual kinds of illnesses besides poison oak?*

Well, your regular colds.



*Any epidemics like measles or anything?*

Not that I know of. I never had any cases to take any place or there wasn't quarantined that I know of, so I would say no. I didn't have to sit in an infirmary; I had a barracks to go back to, and like I said, if I wasn't doing anything I could go down to the PX and just loaf around there and just waste my day.

## **11. Daily Life**

*Did any of the boys ever bring liquor on that base?*

Well, if they did they brought very little, and they weren't drunk.

*They were really careful about that? That was forbidden, wasn't it?*

That was forbidden, yes.

*They never did have any beer parties or anything?*

[Laughter]

*Not officially anyway, did they?*

How come we're all laughing? [Laughter] Not supposed to have. But that happens in the best of places, even over there.

*Tell me about a typical day as you can recall it. What time did you get up, and what did you do? Did you wake up by bugle call?*

Yes. And we had roll call.

*So there would be a bugle that woke you up?*

That woke you up.

*And what time was that?*

You had to be there at 5:30 a.m. and by 6:00 a.m. had to be out there in front of the mess hall, and they'd take roll call.

*So you'd dress quickly, go stand out there and take roll call in formation, like the military.*

Yes, that's right.

*And the military was in charge at that point? Is that right?*

I don't think so, but they called it military. They weren't harsh on you or anything like that. They didn't put you in jail for anything you done bad.

*Didn't have to salute anybody then?*

Well, yes. You salute your commanding officer. That's the only one you saluted.

*You'd fall off for roll call and that would occur 6:00 a.m., and then what would you do?*

Well, then you'd go and eat; that's your next step.

*Was it cafeteria style?*

Yes, it was, you just put your plate down there and the guy would fill it up and you go down the line. But they had their own fellows taking care of you -- you didn't have to take a spoon and take out as much as you wanted or something like that, you could ask for another spoonful if you wanted to, anytime; they would do it.

*In other words, you could have all the food you wanted?*

Oh, yes. They never, never stopped you.

*Was it good food?*

It was very good, yes.

*What would a typical meal have been like?*

Typical meal? Well, I like that stuff on the shingles myself. I always like that.

*Was it chipped beef?*

Yes, chipped beef, with gravy. I like that very much. And we had our beans, and everything else, and had chicken; we had everything.

*Was it 3-C boys who were serving the meals and cooking it?*

Yes, even the cooks.

*Then some of the jobs the boys signed up for were to cook?*

Yes, that's right.

*Like you were a truck driver.*

Yes, but see, all the fellows here in the whites, they're cooks. There's three cooks and the rest of them are officers' men; they take care of the officers' payroll and bring in the food and stuff like that, and they make their beds, they take care of the officers' quarters.

*Were there some jobs in the camp that were more desired than other jobs? Did a lot of people want to be an ambulance driver?*

Well, nobody wanted my job. [Laughter] But I would do everything else, you know. If you worked for the Forest Service, in the mornings at 8:00 a.m. you'd load the truck with axes, scrub hoes, and stuff like that. One crew would make roads or trails, another one would have saws and they'd cut down trees, and they'd pile wood on the side of the road, stuff like that.

*Hand saws or chain saws?*

Chain saws. Even had a buzz saw on wheels with a motor, and two guys who'd split a log up there; just slide it through there, and one ends off and puts it over there.

*So, let's see, in the typical day would be, wake up around 5:00 a.m. be at roll call at 6:00 a.m. go to chow and be on the job by about 8:00 a.m.?*

That's right.

*And did you have a crew leader that assigned you a task?*

That's right. Each one had a crew leader, and so many men. Twenty-five, thirty men, it all depends.

*And that was a crew?*

That's a crew, yes.

*You were a leader of one of those crews?*

No, I never had a crew. Why I got the assistant leader deal was I had a special job. See, I would work with the Forest Service or the Army. That's what we called it. Which the Army started this whole thing I guess, I don't know for sure, never did find that out. But we had an Army officer as head of the camp, so I always figured that that part of it was Army. And as far as the ambulance concern is and the supply truck, that was Army licensed, you see. This is a Forest Service truck [pointing to picture. BZ]. Now this is a place, see, they were up in the woods, they were cutting wood now. Now we could see some of that wood down at camp, in some of our buildings.

*You heated with wood, did you?*

Well, some of the places, yes. And in our barracks, yes.

*What did you have, wood stoves?*

No, we had what they called fifty-five gallon drums made into stoves, planed down.

*Wood heaters? So you'd got out and work on one of these projects, then let's say, until about noon? And then break for lunch, would you?*

That's right.

*So you'd break around 11:30 a.m. for lunch?*

11:30 a.m.

*Would they have brought food out to you, or did you carry sacks?*

Well, if you were too far away, like we were at the Capitol building in Salem, we would eat at the Forest Service headquarters, across from the State Penitentiary. And they had cooks over there. Now, I don't know where the cooks came from. They were 3-C boys; they might have a special bunch of cooks just for them there at the Forest Service -- men working there, too. We'd go there at 11:30 a.m., eat, and we wouldn't have to be back on the job until 1:00 p.m. Then we'd quit about 3:30 p.m., came back home again from Salem every night.

*Now what if you were up in the forest, what would you do for lunch?*

Well, let's say you had a forest fire you can't leave, they'd bring it to you in kettles.

*You never did carry sack lunches, they always brought the food to you?*

No, we never did.

*What kind of food was it at noon? Cold cuts or things like that?*

No, it was always hot. It was made at the camp and put in a certain truck, and they'd come up there with all the big kettles, no matter what it was -- peas, beans, potatoes, meat.

*So you had pretty solid food, huh?*

It was very good. Yes, very solid.

*So then you'd return to camp at 3:00 p.m. or 4:00 p.m. or whatever?*

In that hour, yes.

*What would you do then?*

Well, you'd have to go clean up, then you'd have roll call, then you'd go eat again. Then the rest of the day is yours -- that's if you're allowed out of camp. We weren't allowed out of camp every darn night; you got to have a pass; and if you done something wrong you didn't get a pass. [Laughter]

*But you don't remember the military as being too hard on you?*

No. They were wonderful fellows.

*We've noticed in some of the old reports someone would come by and inspect the camp and make a statement such as the camp seems okay, and there's no communist activity; this was put in the report. Do you remember any discussions about communism?*

Never heard of it, no.

## 12. Political Discussions

*Was there ever any political discussions at all? Among the fellows? That you remember?*

No. The only time we had any discussion was when we had a fire hose fight [Laughter], and got the captain in on it and everything else, and he got wet, soaking wet, and he was mad then. We was quarantined for a couple of weeks, but that's all right.

*One barracks against another?*

That's right.

*Did you have a lot of horse play like that?*

That's the biggest one we had.

*What exactly happened?*

Well, like one fellow starts out as a joke, he opens up a door and another guy's there with a fire extinguisher, squirts him, and then he figures, well, I'll fix you. There's a hose around the side and there's a spigot there, and he turns that on. And the other guy goes to the back and there's another one in the back, so there we go. Or else they go down to the other barracks -- the hose will reach to the next barrack, you know; the barracks were twenty-five feet apart, something like that, they were in rows.

*Were each of the barracks named?*

No, just numbered.

*What was your barrack, do you remember?*

Well, like C-24, C-30, or whatever the heck it is.

## 13. Calloway Creek Dam

*Have you been back to the Arboretum since you left?*

I was back there two weeks ago, three weeks ago; I took my neighbor up there to look at it. We built a dam up on top, too, by the nursery; we used to go swimming in there.

*Did you help build that dam?*

Yes.

*On Calloway Creek?*

Yes, we put them rocks in there. All around that darn thing.



*Tell me about that. What was that project like?*

Well, that was a good job. [Laughter] They just dug it out, carried the mud away.

*Did they dig it with shovels, or with mechanical devices like Caterpillars?*

No, they never had Caterpillars up there. Shovels, shovels, yes. We never had a backhoe up there, or anything like that. There was a hole there, before we started.

Then we put a plug in it, a valve so you could drain it; it could drain right now.

Then we put a platform out there, a diving board. Now they tell me they've got fish in there.

*Are you talking about Cronemiller Lake?*

Cronemiller? I don't know what it's called. We never had a name for it that I know of.

*But you were there when they actually damned it up and filled it?*

That's right.

*Were you there when they first started building the reservoir? Or was it already in progress?*

Oh, no, it wasn't in progress. We were there the first to build it.

*How long did it take to build it from start to end, do you know?*

Well, I don't think it took six to seven months from the time they piled the rock in there.

*So you guys went swimming in there?*

Yes.

*In the evenings or in the day?*

In the evenings. There was no women around there, just Mac's wife.

*Mary McDaniel?*

Yes, she was a way down below at that time. Then they built her house up towards the lake. Do you remember the house, or did you see the house?

Yes.

Remember the first house you come to?

Yes.

On the left hand side, that used to be the nursery. And a house built on top of it, kind of like a three-car garage, or two-car garage in it. They built the house there, then they finally built them a nice house up two city blocks or something.

#### 14. Driving Accident Stories

*What do you remember about Vern McDaniel?*

Oh, he's an old grouch. [Laughter] Yes, I turned the ambulance over coming down the hill one day.

*You turned it over?*

Yes.

*How did you do that?*

Well, I guess I was going too fast and lost control. I skidded about 150 feet or something like that.

*Did you completely roll over?*

No, just on the side. I don't remember going over and over but . . .

*Didn't get hurt?*

No, didn't get hurt.

*What did Vern think about that?*

He squealed on me. [Laughter] It wasn't nothing to get it back up on its legs -- we had a lot of help, fellows came to help me -- but he squealed on me. They found out.

*Who'd he tell?*

The captain, Woody.

*What did the captain do?*

Nothing. Give me the devil. "Well, what we going to do about it," and I said, "I don't know what you're going to do about it." See, I always had to go to Vancouver Barracks to get my truck fixed if I had something bad, and if I couldn't get there, I could get it fixed any place, send them a bill. But anyway, I could take it up there.

We had inspection every month, or every two months, or every three months.

Whenever they decided they'd send you a letter, and then you'd go up there and have it fixed. And what they would do is tune the whole thing and they'd look, kick the tires around, and if it needed new ones on, they'd put new ones on. Then they give you a kit -- it had two headlight bulbs in it, it had an extra spark plug, and it had fuses, stuff like that; they'd keep that kit full, too; that's to get you home. But we never had any trouble that way. I never had any big breakdowns until I hit the bridge at Yaquina one night.

*You hit the bridge?*

Yes, about 2:00 in the morning.

*What were you doing out at 2:00 in the morning?*

I was taking a guy to the Vancouver Barracks. He got hit with a bale of hay, believe it or not. Fell out of an airplane -- I mean, they threw it out of the airplane, so he could sleep.

*Wait a minute. Tell me this story.*

We were at Smith River fire and they throw eggs by the cratefull, stuff like that, see.

*They throw eggs out to the people down below to eat?*

To eat, yes.

*So they cushioned them so they wouldn't break?*

They tried to. All right, now this was an old cabin or some darn thing up in the hills, and this guy threw a bale of hay so this guy could sleep up there. There were a bunch of them to sleep up there, because they couldn't come down that hill or that mountainside.

*Because they were fighting fires?*

That's right, they were fighting fires. So he throws out a bale of hay to them -- maybe threw out dozens to them I don't know that. All I know is a bale of hay came down on this building and the guy thought it was going to come through the damn building, so he runs outside there. Just as he runs outside, it hit him on the back. [Laughter] Man, he wasn't laughing when I took him all the way up there; I tell you he was screaming. I thought in Waldport I'd have to do something there, take him to some hospital closer. We strapped him down and we finally got him up there.

*Was his back broken?*

No, it was never broke. But pretty badly wrenched.

*And so you hit the bridge, ah?*

I fell asleep.

*Fell asleep and hit the bridge.*

That woke me up. [Laughter]

*That fellow that was back there with the hurt back, did that disturb him at all?*

Well, he screamed.

*Did it damage your ambulance?*

I busted a wheel.

*What did you do?*

We put another wheel on. Take off.

*Kept going?*

Kept on going, yes. And then when I got up there they just said, "How did it happen," and I said, "I'll be darned if I know." "Well, you got to get a new wheel and tire. We'll put it on." They don't say much to you; they were nice about everything.

**15. Oregon Forest Nursery**

*Let's go back to Vern McDaniel. What other experiences have you had with him?*

Oh, he was a pretty nice fellow, other than that. I always liked him. But I don't think he liked me [Laughter] because I wouldn't take some of the guff.

*What kind of guff did he hand out?*

He'd act like he owned the whole place, to me. He'd even try to be more than our officers was at camp. You know what I mean, make believe he could run them around. That's what I thought and maybe it wasn't so, but that's the way I always look at it. I'd see him in town today or tomorrow, I'd talk to him; we always talked together as far as that's concerned. The only thing I had against him that time was squealing on me, that was enough for me.

*He wasn't that much older than you, was he? Was he about your age?*

He's ten years older, I think.

*So at that time you were around twenty-one, he must have been in his early thirties.*

Thirties, I'd say or thirty-five, or some place around there.

*Did a lot of the boys work directly under him on the project, under his supervision?*

No, he only had one.

*One boy?*

One fellow. This one fellow, he was just like me, an assistant leader, that's the way he got his. He'd stay up there at the same building; he didn't have to come down to camp.

*Stayed up at Mac's place?*

Yes, stayed up with Mac.

*What kind of duties did he perform for Mac?*

He done the shipping, load trees and stuff like that out.

*Did some of the boys work in the nursery and ship out trees?*

Oh, yes.

*Planting trees?*

Had acres and acres of them, yes.

*Did they actually plant seedlings and did all the chores.*

Oh, yes, they did all that. They don't do that anymore up there? They had rows and rows and rows of them.

*What else did you do? You mentioned building roads, and blasting the quarry, and working on Calloway Dam. What other projects do you remember other than driving the ambulance and driving men around?*

Forest fires. Anything like that came up, we'd go.

*What about Oak Creek Guard Station?*

I never went there. I don't know anything about it.

## **16. Camp Buildings**

*So they weren't working on that when you were there?*

No.

*How about any of the buildings at the Arboretum? Did the CCC boys help build any of those?*

No, not that I know of.

*So the camp was finished completely?*

Well, no, they put the woodwork shop in last. They was building on that there while I was there. That was next to the nursery.

*When you went out there a couple of weeks ago, how did you feel? What was your reaction? Sad, happy, surprised, what?*

Well, I just didn't think much of them guys tearing down them nice buildings.

*Is most of what you remember gone then?*

Well, yes, most of it. But I don't know about this here, where we're standing on the row here in the picture. Them buildings there, it looks like they made a new building there. But we had buildings there, and we had buildings there, and we had the PX down here. And we had all our barracks lined up this way, see? Four of them. Then we had a Forest Service quarters, a long one, besides them two, out that way. And then they had a building with four stalls -- stalls separated by four poles -- that was for the ambulance, the supply truck and the Forest Service, like the head of the Forest Service. They'd park their cars in there; that's why the other two stalls are there. The officers, they didn't have any stalls for their cars, they just had a building. But, if you know some of them pictures, they had lots of buildings, but I don't know why they should tear them down. They were all good buildings.

*Do you have a lot of good memories of the camp? Was it a good experience for you?*

Yes, it was a wonderful experience for me. If I had any kids I wouldn't mind sending them all down there. I only had five children.

#### **17. Love at First Sight**

*They're all grown now?*

Yes, they're all grown.

*Did you meet Mrs. Sekermestrovich while you were stationed there?*

Yes.

*And where did you meet her?*

Skating rink. I'd seen her before.

*What was it about her that caught your eye?*

Well, I guess I was driving down the road in my ambulance one day, where Berman's Drug Store was -- well, whatever drugstore it was. She was coming across the street and I had to stop her, or if I didn't stop I saw her; but she went by, and that was it.

*What year was that, do you remember?*

1940.

*Toward the end of your stay here, then?*

Yes, 1940. I was out of camp, but I'd seen her before I left the camp. I was still driving the Army ambulance. I used to go to Triangle Lake and a side camp there.

See the side camps don't have doctors, so I would take this doctor of mine down to check the boys over there, once a week, or something like that. Unless something happens and they call you, you're supposed to go down there together.

*Was a side camp different from a spike camp?*

No, I think it's the same thing. But a spike camp -- that's logging talk -- like a bunch of loggers got a four- or five-guy camp, they called a spike camp, with the headquarters here for the big camp. But ours was what you called a side camp. I don't know why they called it that, but they called them side camps. But they had different numbers and they was different class of people, stuff like that. Like up here on Marys Peak they had people there, they was all from the South.

#### **18. Marys Peak Side Camp**

*Now wait a minute. They had a camp on Marys Peak?*

Oh, yes. As you go up Marys Peak.

*Was that the conscientious objectors' camp? Was it a 3-C camp?*

Yes, it was a 3-C camp. It was up around the circle like this here.

*How big a camp was it? Permanent buildings?*

Permanent buildings, yes. Well, maybe they had seventy-five people up there, or fifty.

*At the same time as Camp Arboretum?*

That's right.

*Did you have much contact with them?*

No. All the contact I had with camps like that was when somebody got hurt or got sick and needed a doctor. If they were all bandaged by somebody there and they had their foot cut or something like that, I could go pick them up and bring them down to my doctor, if my doctor didn't want to go up there. And then I used to go to Toledo. Just as you get into the town in Toledo there, there's a side camp up there.

*Name a couple of camps that were close by.*

The Mill City camp, and Triangle Lake, and Marys Peak. I don't know why they call it Marys Peak, but that one was Marys Peak side camp. Then we had one at Reedsport, too. I just went down there once.

*Did you go to Valsetz?*

Yes, one time. And then the Mill City I went there twice, I guess it was. Tell me to go today and I wouldn't find it, I don't think, but I went. [Laughter]

## 19. Civilian Life

*Let's return once again to your wife. Was it common practice to meet young ladies at the skating rink and get to know them there? Was that usual at that time?*

I think so, yes. That's just like you going to the dance.

*Would you ask them to skate with you, or how did you get to know them, if you saw them and were interested? What would you do?*

Well, I . . . how in the hell was it, I was the kind of fellow that didn't give a hoot about them anyway. [Laughter] I'd just go dancing and do my stuff. I used to like to twirl around. I fell a lot but that's all right, that's beside the point. Yes, a show off -- okay, I was a show off.

*Did you actually skate with girls when you were there, or did you just show off in front of them, or how did you make contact?*

Well, you see when you go skating now for instance, lot's of time they put a record on and they say all right, now couples. Or else you can pick your couples. And it got to the point there when nobody was skating with a gal and they finally said, the gals can go out and pick up a fellow, see? And that started more of them to going. But she never picked me up, I picked her up.

*But you didn't actually get to know each other very much until you were out of the 3-C program?*

Oh, that's right. I'd seen her before and everything else.

*Had you decided to stay in Corvallis anyway, or what were you doing when you got out?*

I just got sick of it one day, and said, "Well, heck. I want to do something else." So I asked my commanding officer. "Yes," he said, "You can quit anytime you want to. We're supposed to send you home. But you can stay if you can get a job, and a guy will sign for you and make sure you have a good job, or he'll look out for you." Mr. Russell signed for me that he would guarantee me a job. That was Russell Hatchery.



*Mr. Russell who owned Russell's Hatchery.*

Yes. So that's the way I got to get out of there. All you had to do then was go to the office and they make out your discharge and as long as you got a job it was all right with the government.

*Now you didn't think about going back to Ohio?*

Right away, no. I was thinking on making some money and driving back there or something like that, which I never did.

*And that was the period when you got to know your wife?*

Yes, I met my wife after I was working on construction a little bit, east of the river there; I painted the bridge. A man fell in one day, and I went over and took his job. And then I bought a used car and went back to E.P. Brands and I argued with them about this used car. It was a wreck, this and that, and they asked me what was the matter with it. I told them, "You couldn't fix anything any better than that," I says, "I don't know what the hell you're selling used cars for." So he says, "You're all that good how about working for us." So I says, "Well, great." So I started working in a garage.

*What was the name of that company?*

E.P. Brands Chevrolet Garage.

*You started working there then as a mechanic and salesman?*

No, used car repair. You take a used car in and make it look like new.

*That must have been near the outbreak of World War II?*

Yes, pretty close coming up.

*What happened then? Did you go in the service?*

Well, I just decided I'd better get married first. [Laughter] So we got married.

*In 1940? Somewhere in there?*

February 1942.

*The war had already started, though in December of 1941.*

Yes.

*But you didn't go into the military at all?*

Yes, I went in 1942 and came back in 1946.

*Were there a lot of men like you who came here with the 3-C and decided to stay for one reason or another? Do you know of any others that did that?*

Oh, Joe Cole; he lives in Waldport or Newport. And Albert Pochurek; he lived in Corvallis; he's dead now.

*What about his wife? Is she still alive?*

She's still alive, lives down the hill on Mulkey. I don't know the number but it's two blocks down on the left hand side. Pochurek used to work for Mac.

*Can you think of anybody else besides the ones you've mentioned?*

Woodrow Wilson, he's in Albany; he works for the plywood or veneer plant there.

*And he's alive?*

Yes. He used to be the officers' mess tent honcho. In the company picture, he was the one in the whites, the heavy set fellow, about your size. Domonic Tate lives in Indiana. Ed Genoso lives in Chicago. Paul Francis lives in Oregon City.

*Is there anybody else you can think of?*

I've heard there's a fellow who drives a city bus in Albany who was in the 3-C. He's been driving a bus ever since he left camp, they claim. But I don't think I knew him.

*In a camp that size did you get to know pretty well everybody, or just your barracks?*

No, just like my barracks, now I couldn't name half the people.

*Do you remember Bryson McKelvey?*

He was a Forest Service man. Right? He was a head honcho.

*Terry Brown, was he there?*

Yes.

*How about Wesley Brown?*

He was the head of the trucks, the mechanics, and he taught mechanics. He lived in Lewisburg on Eliot Circle years ago.

## 20. The Great Depression

*Going back all the way to the start, for a few minutes, let me ask you about the Depression.*

*You joined the 3-C's, I assume, because you needed a job?*

No, I joined the C's because I was broke. [Laughter]

*What was it like in that period? Was that a pretty desolate time for people?*

Yes.

*How do you remember that?*

Well, what would you call freezing, or else going downtown stealing coal out of coal boxes, and freight cars? Yes, we had to do that.

*Pretty tough times for everybody, then, huh?*

Yes, it was. I don't know who paid the bills, I really don't -- how people ever paid rent or anything like that, I don't see that part of it. I guess you got your house free or else that guy couldn't take it away because nobody else wanted it. Nobody had the money to buy it from you or from him, so it just stood that way.

*What was your father doing at that time?*

He was a brick layer.

*Was he out of work?*

Yes, he was out of work, most of the time. There wasn't any construction then.

*How did the family support itself then?*

They did just like everybody else -- on the relief. I guess you'd call it. I went to camp and I'd send my money home.

*You helped out by sending money back to them?*

That's right. That's what you do in the first place when you join them camps; you're supposed to send the money home.

*Did they make you do that, or just recommend it?*

I think that was they way you got to join up in the first place; you was supposed to send some home.

*Did they just give you cash at the end or a week, or month, or a check, or how did they pay you?*

They give you cash.

*But then were you supposed to send that home?*

They'd send it home. You just ell them how much.

*They just took it out of your pay check.*

That's right. Just like you would for your PX coupons, it was the same way. They give you a coupon book, but when pay day comes, you paid that. And if you overdrew, well, we'll get you next month. [Laughter]

*You had some brothers and sisters.*

Yes, I had brothers and sisters.

*How big a family was that?*

Ten.

*Ah! Did any of those go in the 3-C camp?*

None of them. They're gold bricks, all of them. [When Ed repeated this same statement to me over ten years later, his eyes were twinkling and he was grinning with obvious pride. BZ]

## **21. Return Visits**

*Did you ever leave Corvallis once you came back in 1946?*

Yes, I went home four times.

*But just to visit?*

Yes. And come back.

*You lived in Corvallis, and that's where you came back after the war?*

That's right.

*And you hadn't been back to Camp Arboretum until two weeks ago?*

Oh, no, when I came back the first time I went there. When I came back in 1946 or 1947, or whatever the heck it was.

*What was the camp like after 1942, when it wasn't a 3-C camp anymore? Do you recall?*

No, I don't. I think that's funny when I got out of there, I didn't meet anybody from there after that. I don't know why. Just like going to a different street. They all went some place else, and that's it.

*One of the notes we made was something about feeding starving livestock. Do you remember anything like that?*

No, must have been when I was out of town. [See Starker and Berg oral histories regarding the "Blue Snow" of 1887-1888. BZ]

*Did your group move out by the time you quit?*

Oh, no. I quit before they moved.

## 22. The Sign Shop

*What kinds of organizations came out to camp? Did churches come out?*

Oh, yes. We had churches come out and we had firemen come out, and we had first aid classes.

*So you had classes at the camp?*

Yes. They didn't force you to go to some of them. Like the first aid class, if you wanted to go to first aid class, you went to first aid class; there was no forcing. It was real neat, I'd say. And like, a fire chief from Corvallis comes out there and he'd show you different ways to fight fires. That's campfire I'm talking about; I'm not talking about the fires out in the woods; he didn't have anything to do with that. The Forest Service was in charge of classes on fighting forest fires, so the ones that fought forest fires, they went to them classes.

*What other organizations came out to camp?*

Oh, we had a tall fellow come in to run the woodwork class. And we made signs for everybody around Oregon, for gateways I mean. Those signs they put up like they say Marys Peak, 20 miles away, or 5 miles away, whatever it is.

*Mounted signs?*

Mounted signs. We made the big signs, entry signs.

*These are wood, routed out?*

Routed out just like the one that is up there. That's one I made there. They rout out big ones.

*They call this a rustic sign?*

Rustic signs shop, yes, ma'am.

*What about the Salmon River Guard Station? Do you remember anything about that?*

I've heard about it, yes, but I never went there.

*Didn't work on that one?*

Never worked on it. I never knew who went that far from camp, unless they had a fire. The farthest I know we ever went was Cottage Grove, what they call the Smith River fire; that was the farthest we went that way. And the farthest we ever went towards Portland I know of would be Dallas; they called that the Gooseneck fire. And that was the only one that I know of.

*What color were the buildings painted in the camp? Do you remember?*

Dark brown. Every building.

*[EDITOR'S NOTE: I asked Mr. Sekermestrovich in August, 1990, if it was possible that the buildings were green. His wife said that she remembered them as green, and he agreed that they may have been that color.]*

*What was it trimmed in?*

Lighter brown, I'd say. It was kind of more rustic looking.

*By then they'd already begun the Arboretum and they had quite a few trees planted. Did you ever go over there and look at the different varieties?*

No, never did. And I told you that when they get so big they sell them, or they ship them out, because that's what Pochurek was doing. He used to bunch them by the thousands, or by the half thousands, I don't know what the bunches were. They got a freezer out there and everything to keep them in.

*Cold storage you mean?*

Cold storage, yes.

*There's a building out there they still call Cold Storage. Was that building there when you were there?*

That must have been it then. That was about the biggest part of the camp. You can see right there in this little picture. That's about the best picture I've got. I've got a friend out here at Lewisburg. I called him up this morning and maybe I can get some pictures from him. He's got pictures of the buildings.

## BACKGROUND: EDWARD SEKERMESTROVICH

Edward was the second of nine children born to Michael and Mary Asoda Sekermestrovich. Though both came from Vukovar, Yugoslavia, they met and married in the United States. Edward grew up and attended public schools in Akron, Ohio.

The Depression years made it difficult for young men to find work. Many were saved from idleness by formation of the Civilian Conservation Corps (CCC). Edward enrolled at the age of 19, spending his first six-month "hitch" at Camp Fairlawn just outside Akron. His second enrollment found him on a train to Oregon with a number of other Ohio boys. They were the second or third group of recruits to occupy Camp Arboretum north of Corvallis. They helped build up the camp with additional buildings and roads, plus the excavation for Cronemiller Lake. (They also gave the camp a cleaner reputation!)

Boys could sign up for various classes in wood shop, auto mechanics, forestry, etc. The name, Arboretum, indicated the main reason for the camp's location. Many species of evergreens were started from seed, then set out in long rows to develop into a size large enough to be planted as part of reforestation programs.

Many of the state park and forest signs still in use today were created in those wood shop classes. Picnic tables and benches, bench seats cut from solid logs, and plank steps down steep trails to coastal beaches are further examples of their labors. Edward was among several who fashioned their own yew wood bows and arrows for a class in archery.

His main interests were in auto mechanics and welding classes held at Oregon State College, now O.S.U. As a result he drove and maintained one of the trucks in which the fellows were transported to and from job sites, such as fighting forest fires. They helped clear the site of the old State Capitol after it burned in 1935, and aided in the construction of the present building.

As ambulance driver, he responded to calls from around the valley and along the coast. Unless a patient was deemed critical, he was delivered to Vancouver Barracks hospital in Washington State.

One afternoon Edward stopped his truck to allow two girls to cross the street in downtown Corvallis. He remarked to his passenger, "I'd like to marry that girl some day," and pointed to me. When I asked, four years later, "What took you so long?" he quipped, "I knew you were too young."

After his discharge, he was employed at the Chevrolet garage in Corvallis. We finally met while roller skating. We were married in 1942, shortly before he entered the Army Air Corps. Following basic training in Texas, he was stationed briefly at Bolling Field in Washington, D.C. where he drove mail truck. (He still brags he could stop even a presidential parade as the mail had top priority over all events.) His more permanent station was at Rosecrans Field near St. Joseph, Missouri, where I could join him. We had 1-1/2 years together before he was sent to India for the duration of World War II. I remained in St. Joseph with our brand new son to await his return and discharge.

His training and experience in mechanics and welding offered him real challenges at Karachi Air Base. He earned government citations for welding damaged fuel tanks on planes, a chore few would accept, and for aiding in the perfection and installation of a circular antenna that would remain horizontal above, but close to the fuselage. It would not snap or bend beyond use during steep dives or climbs. He taught his Indian helpers welding skills. In return, they made trinkets and souvenirs for him to send or take back to the states.

We returned to Oregon in 1946 to make our home. Several of those Ohio boys either stayed in or returned to Oregon following the war. Edward found steady employment at Corvallis Lumber Co. (at the confluence of the Marys and Willamette Rivers). After that mill closed in the early 1950's, he worked for Rex Clemens' Forest Products and Veneer plants in Philomath as head millwright until a work injury forced early retirement. We successfully raised our five children in Corvallis, and are currently enjoying the progress of eight grandchildren.

Ida May Warner Sekermestrovich  
Corvallis, Oregon  
November 3, 1990



## INDEX

|  |                        |
|--|------------------------|
| African Americans                        | 10                     |
| Animals, Domestic                        |                        |
| Doberman Pinscher                        | 6                      |
| Army                                     | 12, 14, 19, 27, 37     |
| Automobiles                              | 12                     |
| Berman's Drug Store                      | 27                     |
| Black, George F.                         | 3                      |
| Blacks [see "African Americans"]         |                        |
| Brands, E.P.                             | 30                     |
| Brown, Terry                             | 31                     |
| Brown, Wesley                            | 31                     |
| Buzz Saw                                 | 19                     |
| Cabin(s)                                 | 24                     |
| California                               | 14                     |
| Presidio                                 | 14                     |
| Camp Arboretum                           | 1-6, 14-16, 28, 33, 36 |
| Barracks                                 | 6, 17, 19, 21, 27      |
| Cold Storage                             | 35                     |
| Mess Hall                                | 17                     |
| Office                                   | 5, 11, 29              |
| PX                                       | 8, 17, 27, 32          |
| Recreation Hall                          | 6, 7                   |
| Signs Shop                               | 34                     |
| Woodwork Shop                            | 26                     |
| CCC Camps                                |                        |
| Adair                                    | 4                      |
| Alsea                                    | 14                     |
| Fairlawn                                 | 1, 3, 36               |
| Marys Peak                               | 28                     |
| Mill City                                | 14, 29                 |
| Reedsport                                | 28                     |
| Toledo                                   | 28                     |
| Triangle Lake                            | 14, 16, 27, 28         |
| Valsetz                                  | 29                     |
| Civilian Conservation Corps (CCC or 3-C) | 1, 3, 6, 26, 36        |
| Cole, Joe                                | 30                     |
| Corvallis Lumber Co.                     | 37                     |
| Creeks                                   |                        |
| Calloway Creek                           | 21                     |
| Cronemiller Lake                         | 22, 36                 |
| Cronemiller, Lynn                        | 22, 36                 |

|  |                       |
|--|-----------------------|
| Crops                                      |                       |
| Beans                                      | 18, 20                |
| Hay  | 24                    |
| Depression Era                             | 31, 36                |
| E.P. Brands Chevrolet Garage               | 30                    |
| Epidemics                                  | 17                    |
| Fire Fighting                              | 7, 20, 26, 34, 36     |
| Fires (see also Forest Fires)              |                       |
| State Capital (1935)                       | 36                    |
| Fish                                       |                       |
| Salmon                                     | 34                    |
| Forest Fires                               |                       |
| Gooseneck Forest Fire                      | 15, 34                |
| Smith River Forest Fire                    | 14, 24, 34            |
| Forest Service (see Oregon State Forestry) |                       |
| Francis, Paul                              | 31                    |
| Genoso, Ed                                 | 31                    |
| GI Soap                                    | 16                    |
| Illinois                                   | 4, 31                 |
| Chicago                                    | 4, 31                 |
| Kentucky                                   | 3                     |
| Fort Knox                                  | 3                     |
| Lindberg Kidnapping                        | 3                     |
| Logging                                    | 28                    |
| Malley, Don                                | 9                     |
| McDaniel, Mary                             | 22                    |
| McDaniel, Vern ("Mac")                     | 5, 22, 23, 25, 26, 31 |
| McKelvey, Bryson                           | 30                    |
| Michigan                                   | 3                     |
| Detroit                                    | 3                     |
| Missouri                                   | 37                    |
| St. Joseph                                 | 37                    |
| Oak Creek Guard Station                    | 26                    |
| Ohio                                       | 1-4, 30, 36, 37       |
| Akron                                      | 1, 4, 36              |
| Fairlawn                                   | 1, 3, 36              |

|                         |  |
|-------------------------|--|
| Oregon State            |  |
| Forest Nursery          | 5, 21, 22, 26                          |
| State Capitol Building  | 7, 20, 36                              |
| State Forestry          | 7, 8, 10, 14, 18-20, 27, 31, 34        |
| State Penitentiary      | 7, 20                                  |
| Oregon Towns and Cities |  |
| Albany                  | 1, 4, 5, 10, 31                        |
| Alsea                   | 13, 14                                 |
| Corvallis               | 1, 5, 9-11, 14, 29, 31, 33, 34, 36, 37 |
| Cottage Grove           | 34                                     |
| Dallas                  | 15, 34                                 |
| Lewisburg               | 13, 31, 35                             |
| Monmouth                | 9                                      |
| Mountain View           | 13                                     |
| Newport                 | 31                                     |
| Oregon City             | 31                                     |
| Philomath               | 37                                     |
| Portland                | 14, 34                                 |
| Reedsport               | 28                                     |
| Salem                   | 7, 9, 20                               |
| Toledo                  | 28                                     |
| Valsetz                 | 29                                     |
| Waldport                | 24, 31                                 |
| Oregon State University | 9, 36                                  |
| Peavy Arboretum         | 6                                      |
| Pochurek, Albert        | 31                                     |
| Politics                | 20                                     |
| Communism               | 20                                     |
| Conscientious Objectors | 28                                     |
| Quarries                | 12, 13, 26                             |
| Recreation              |  |
| Archery                 | 8, 36                                  |
| Cards                   | 8                                      |
| Dancing                 | 29                                     |
| Fights                  | 10                                     |
| Gambling                | 8                                      |
| Horse Play              | 21                                     |
| Ice Skating             | 10                                     |
| Leather Work            | 8                                      |
| Liquor                  | 17                                     |
| Music                   | 8                                      |
| Pool                    | 8                                      |
| Roller Skating          | 10, 36                                 |
| Shopping                | 11                                     |
| Swimming                | 21, 22                                 |

|   |                    |
|---|--------------------|
| Reforestation . . . . .                     | 26, 36             |
| Religion                                    |                    |
| Church . . . . .                            | 10, 11             |
| Rex Clemen's Forest Products . . . . .      | 37                 |
| Rhoads, Bill . . . . .                      | 13                 |
| Roads                                       |                    |
| Highland Drive . . . . .                    | 13                 |
| Lewisburg . . . . .                         | 13                 |
| Mountain View Drive . . . . .               | 13                 |
| Russell, Mr. . . . .                        | 29                 |
| Russell Hatchery . . . . .                  | 29                 |
| Salmon River Guard Station . . . . .        | 34                 |
| Sekermestrovich, Ida May (Warner) . . . . . | 37                 |
| Sekermestrovich, Mary Asoda . . . . .       | 36                 |
| Sekermestrovich, Michael . . . . .          | 36                 |
| Side Camp (CCC) . . . . .                   | 28                 |
| Smith, Bud . . . . .                        | 10                 |
| Spike Camp (CCC) . . . . .                  | 28                 |
| Tate, Dominic . . . . .                     | 31                 |
| Texas                                       |                    |
| Dallas . . . . .                            | 15, 34             |
| Trees                                       |                    |
| Oak . . . . .                               | 16, 26             |
| Yew . . . . .                               | 36                 |
| Vancouver Barracks . . . . .                | 14, 15, 23, 24, 36 |
| Vegetation                                  |                    |
| Poison Oak . . . . .                        | 16                 |
| Wars  |                    |
| World War II . . . . .                      | 30, 37             |
| Washington, D.C. . . . .                    | 37                 |
| Washington State . . . . .                  | 36                 |
| Weather                                     |                    |
| Rain . . . . .                              | 6                  |
| Snow Storms . . . . .                       | 33                 |
| Wilson, Woodrow . . . . .                   | 31                 |
| Woodley, A.B. . . . .                       | 6                  |
| Yaquina Bridge . . . . .                    | 23-24              |
| Yugoslavia . . . . .                        | 36                 |
| Vukovar . . . . .                           | 36                 |