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INTERVIEWEE Harley D. Wade
DATE 24 July 1982
INTERVIEWER Irene Wassell
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HARLEY H. WADE

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Interviewer: Irene Wassell, Staff Reporter, Arkansas Gazette

Q. State your name, please.

A. Harley H. Wade.

Q. Where are you from?

A. Conway.

Q. Before we get started, tell me a little bit about yourself, where you came from, where you were born.

A. I was born in Jacksonville, Arkansas and lived around Pulaski County most of the time after that, moved to North Little Rock when I was about nine years old. Moved to Little Rock from Jacksonville.

Q. Who were your parents?

A. John Wade was my father and Jessie Wade was my mother. Her maiden name was Williford.

Q. Were they natives of Arkansas?

A. My father came from Virginia somewhere, my mother was from Arkansas.

Q. Did you have brothers and sisters?

A. Yes, I had three brothers and five sisters. I was next to the youngest.

Q. So they were pretty well up in years?

A. Yes, one of them being about eighty years old now, and my brother that died, he would be about 82 or 83.

Q. How much education did you have?

A. Sixth grade education. I went to school in North Little Rock and Little Rock. I started in Glendennen in NLR and went to Woodruff School in LR and Robert E. Lee School on Thirteenth Street.

Q. What did you do between the time you quit school and went in the CCC?

A. I did just any kind of work I could get back in those days.

Q. How old were you when you entered (the CCC)?

A. Nineteen.

Q. Where did you learn about (the CCC)?

A. Well, I was working in a grocery store in Pulaski Heights, and my boss at that time was pretty well in politics and he's the one that got me in the CCC.

Q. Was it hard to get in?

A. It really was, because there were just a few jobs for a lot of people. I was in the first camp that was in the state of Arkansas. They gathered on the steps of the old post office building in Little Rock. They took us down and put us on the train and took us to Hot Springs, where they put us on a bus and took us out in a field and showed us a big stack of hay out there and gave us a mattress tick and told us to put some hay in there and make us a mattress.

Q. What was your family's financial situation?

A. My father owned two or three groceries and when he died he was a carpenter contractor. He died when I was nine years old.

Q. How did your mother make a living for you?

A. She had grocery stores, and apartment houses and things.

- Q. Could you have worked for her?
- A. I was too young to work in the grocery store.
- Q. So what would you say were your reasons for joining the CCC?
- A. To better myself, because I was working in a grocery store and that wasn't much of a job riding a bicycle for a boy 19 years old, of course at that time a fellow took anything he could get.
- Q. You said you entered Crystal Springs first, where did you go to sign up for that?
- A. Down to the old post office, in LR, in 1933. I was one of the first 200 in Arkansas.
- Q. You were first stationed at Crystal Springs?
- A. Yes, 18 miles from Hot Springs, I guess you'd call it Garland County. I stayed there 11 months, and got out, and then they sent me back to Tassle Springs, some people call it Bush Mountain, close to Calico Rock. And then (this is not in order) but over in Walco which is over close to Hoxie on Crallers Ridge and Fair Park in LR, and Locke is up close to Mountainburg, and then I went to Sagahatchee which is close to Morilton and then I went to Berryville and I went to Walcott and then to Ashdown and from there I went to the floating camp down at St. Charles and then to land camping and I got out in 1940. I went to cook and bakers school down at the headquarters building in the east end of LR, about 1939.
- Q. So you stayed in from 1933 to 1939?
- A. Something like that.
- Q. What kind of training did you receive?
- A. Well, most of the time I was in the kitchen. You see, I got married while I was at Crystal Springs, but it was on account of I was on special duty that I could still stay in. My wife lived near the camp when it was possible. I was in the CCC camp about two months when I got acquainted with the mess sargeant and I got to be a cook overnight. I ended up mess sargeant before I got out. I was mess sargeant at Ashdown and the two floating camps down at St. Charles.
- Q. Did you do anything besides cook?
- A. No, I never did do anything but that. I was in what they called the cadre at headquarters camp, they started a new camp and I went there for awhile, then I'd go somewhere else.
- Q. What did you do when you weren't cooking?
- A. At Fair Park was about the only place I ever remember that I was out in the field very much. I helped build the spillways in Boyle Park. You go out there and it looks natural, but it's not natural, those big rocks were put there by boys in CCC camp and the trails got started by us marching through them and mashed them down.
- Q. Did you drive all the way from Crystal Springs every day?
- A. No, I rode from camp, and at that time I was married when I was in Crystal Springs and my wife lived in LR and we weren't supposed to have a car but I managed to have one. Of course I had to park it away from the camp, so I would get me a load of boys and come home on weekends. I think at that time a round trip from Crystal Springs to LR was about an hour and a half. I had a 29 Ford ^{model A} roadster which in 33 wasn't a bad car. We wasn't really supposed to have one but being as I was on special duty I guess the commanding officer turned his head a little bit. Of course I parked it away from camp. You know rumors get started and it gets back to them without a doubt.

- Q. Do you think a lot of regulations were broken that you didn't get caught?
- A. Well, not anything to amount to anything, because they were pretty strict on them. But I don't see yet where it hurt anything me having a car. Of course, you weren't supposed to be financially able to have one but I managed to keep it up, and it afforded me transportation back and forth to LR off what I got off of the boys because the car didn't cost me but \$22.50. Gas was 15¢ or 20¢ a gallon.
- Q. What would they have done to you?
- A. They would have discharged me. I figured they knew, if everybody had had a car it would have been different. There were very few that managed to get one, and I got one.
- Q. Did the camps where you were have educational opportunities?
- A. They all had educational advisors. They had classes. I saw boys that couldn't read and write and I remember one boy at Walcott, he'd have a package of Bull Durham and wherever you'd see him he was trying to read on that. Someone that really wanted to learn, there was always an opportunity because educational advisors there were certified teachers, they had their diploma, and just like everything else at CCC camp, they had first class stuff.
- Q. Did you take any of the courses?
- A. I went over to the educational building and studied some, but I didn't really take any courses to amount to anything.
- Q. Do you remember what the courses were that were offered?
- A. If you wanted to read and write you could take that, of course they didn't have any engineer course or anything like that, just plain everyday schooling.
- Q. What kind of recreational facilities did they have?
- A. Well, they had baseball fields and horseshoe games, I remember pitching that. Just any kind of little games like that.
- Q. Did they have competition?
- A. I don't remember any competition only among themselves. I don't remember about with other camps.
- Q. Did you have enough time to participate in recreational activities, since you were married most of the time?
- A. Well, I guess I couldn't, because as mess sergeant and cook, because you worked every other day as cook and as mess sergeant you were supposed to be there at all three meals but in between times you had your menu and everything figured out you had some spare time.
- Q. What did you do in your spare time?
- A. Most generally hung around camp because there wasn't that much time between one meal and the next. You swapped stories, went to the recreation hall and played pool or pingpong or whatever you wanted to do.
- Q. Was there a lot of bootlegging going on or did you see any of that?
- A. I never did see or get involved in that very much because I was married and didn't run around very much but that bootlegging is going to be around with the times. You still can find bootleggers if you want them.
- Q. Describe for me what your typical day was, what did you do on a typical day.
- A. Well, I had to be there for breakfast, see that the breakfast got out all right. As mess sergeant, if breakfast was at seven o'clock, I'd get up there in time. Of course, the night before the stuff was put out for breakfast next morning and I would get up in time to see that it was getting out on time. But when I was cook I got up there and got the breakfast, and stayed till they cleaned it up at night.

- Q. You were responsible for cleaning up as well as cooking?
- A. When I was mess sergeant I was responsible for the kitchen period. We had a mess officer who had gone to college and things, but we had one at St. Charles, I wouldn't want to mention his name, but he never did make out a menu and never did figure the menu, or the cost of one. I did it all, because he didn't know how.
- Q. Getting back to a typical day, after you had breakfast, what then?
- A. I'd see that the kitchen was cleaned up, then sometime during the morning the commanding officer came around and inspected and I had to go around, and I carried a pad with me, and whatever he found wrong I'd see that it was fixed so it was clean the next time. Then when the district inspector came around I'd have to go around with them and if I got too many gigs I heard about it.
- Q. Were the men there for lunch?
- A. Most of them were out in the field, but we had big containers to keep the food hot and we'd send it out to them.
- Q. Can you describe those containers for me?
- A. It was just a big insulated container that had a lid on it and when they were tightened down it would keep the food just as hot just like a thermos bottle to feed about fifty men. I don't know what they'd call them.
- Q. Then after lunch, you had some free time then until dinner time?
- A. Well, I had to allow 35 to 40 cents a day to feed those men, and I had to keep the menu 30 days in advance. Of course you couldn't always follow them you tried to as close as you could, then after the meals and the day was gone to make a good mark you would change that menu to where it would follow your form so you would get a good mark just like you would on anything else. But you still had to stay within that 35 or 40 cents because you know at home you can't plan a meal, ^{30 days} you might have something left that that would be cheaper to feed that way. It wouldn't be that you were doing anything they would disapprove of but to get a good mark to make them think you were really good, you would change what you fed to something that was supposed to have been on there. You can't feed men on 35 cents a day if you didn't feed leftovers. Like stew, I'd save up stuff for stew and of course whatever meal I would have that stew it would show up on the menu that it was costing something but actually it wasn't costing hardly anything because you'd charged it out before.
- Q. Were you able to use that money for something else?
- A. Well, there were just certain things, and it was just like any other rules and regulations the government's got, you can kind of bend them around to where you don't violate any rules. What I'm talking about, if we had \$200 left over this month and we needed some utility or something for the kitchen, we'd buy it for the kitchen, but maybe you weren't supposed to spend your money on that, but your commanding officer would help you on this because the mess sergeant didn't have control of the money, writing the checks or nothing because you had to have the commanding officer approve, and he'd it up so we bought something that was approved but it would be for the benefit of the kitchen and it was the way it should have been.
- Q. Your main meal of the day was the dinner hour?
- A. You'd give them a good breakfast and a good supper. Not all camps sent their meals out in the field, I was thinking particularly about St. Charles. I was a baker at night there and I'd bake pies or cakes, whatever it was, for the next day. This wouldn't take very long, and then I'd have to make sandwiches for that whole, all the men going out, they'd take sandwiches, but at St. Charles we had those food containers we'd send them out in.

- Q. Getting on with the typical day now, after supper what would you do?
- A. After supper and the kitchen was cleaned up, the time was mine to do whatever I wanted to. Usually if my wife was around I'd go home.
- Q. How long were you in when you got married?
- A. Less than six months. You signed up for a six month hitch, and I got to stay in the second six months because I was married. And I got out and I got back in because I was married. I went down and applied for relief, and they said, well, you've got experience in the CCC camp and we've got an opening up here for a cook, and I could make more money on that than the WPA, so I went back to CCC camp and I stayed in till about 40.
- Q. Were you considered special because you were a cook or because you were married?
- A. Because I was a cook. I could have special privileges like being married and going home at night on account of being one.
- Q. What kind of food did you cook? You told me about breakfast - what did you usually have for dinner?
- A. Well, roast beef, or whatever money would allow.
- Q. You mentioned making desserts awhile ago...did they have dessert every day?
- A. Well, I can make any kind of dessert for a company of men that you can make at home. Pies, or cakes, or I remember we had open house down at St. Charles one time and we had doughnuts for the visitors, and coffee, and we made the doughnuts.
- Q. Was that usual fare, if you had dessert?
- A. Well, we had dessert of some kind for supper. It may have been bread pudding we'd made out of leftover bread, we used everything we could to feed the men as good as we could. Like the first three or four days of the month I'd try to feed the cheapest I could, good wholesome meals, don't misunderstand me, but then the last of the month I'd be trying to spend my money buying ice cream. I was considered to feed pretty good in the average CCC camp around.
- Q. Did you have refrigeration facilities?
- A. We had a big ice box, and the company truck would go to the ice house every day in town, and get ice in 300 pound blocks. They didn't have electric refrigerators.
- Q. You were nineteen when you joined up - had you ever been away from home?
- A. Well, yes, I had made tomato harvests and I tried to find work anyway I could and if there was a tomato harvest in Texas and I knew I could get a job I'd go.
- Q. How did you feel about being away from home in the CCC, or were you that far away that it made that much difference?
- A. Well, I was in Arkansas. I never was more than a hundred miles away from home. It didn't bother me about getting homesick.
- Q. How did your family feel about your being away from home?
- A. Well, when I first got in my mother thought it was a wonderful thing that I could get a job.
- Q. Did you correspond with your family and friends?
- A. There wasn't hardly a month I wasn't home once or twice a month. I never was one much to write letters because I was home too much. When I was off working in the tomato harvests I wrote letters.

- Q. Do you feel that the training you had in the CCC helped you after you left?
- A. I definitely believe it did. Just generally. I was a typical boy running out there on the street when I got in there, and when I got out I thought I was a pretty good fellow, you know, moral and all that. I got out in 30 or 40, and of course I was married, and I started to work out at Camp Robinson then, was put in the hospital then.
- Q. Are you still a cook?
- A. No, I was a diesel mechanic when I retired 11 years ago. I was a cook just the time I was in the CCC camp, because I got out and went down to the Marion Hotel and was going to get me a job, and when I found out they didn't pay but \$10 a week I told them I didn't want it.
- Q. Did you serve in the military?
- A. No, I was in civil service. I was under the military. I was first cook on my shift out there at camp Robinson, three or four years, something like that. I quit before the war was over. I was figuring on going but they never did call me.
- Q. Did you have a civilian rating at Camp Robinson?
- A. I was just called first cook out there. I was never in the military. I took the place of military out there cooking but never got the benefits. I considered I was doing just as much as anybody else did.
- Q. You left cooking in 1944 - what did you do then?
- A. I went to Mechanical City Bus Company in Little Rock, which was AP&L owned the bus company then, I retired from ABF as diesel mechanic - Arkansas Best Freight - I worked for them 14 years. I've been retired 11 years.
- Q. You've lived in Little Rock all that time?
- A. Ever since then. I had a place up on Lake Conway and I lived up there mostly. I lived in LR most of the time I was working.
- Q. What did your wife do?
- A. My wife died two years ago and I've since got remarried and she's retired too.
- Q. My wife Emma died in 1980. Her maiden name was Swinger, she was from St. Vincent close to Morillon. My present wife, Ruby McCraw, and she worked down at Oppenheimers and places like that.
- Q. Where did you meet your wife you married while in the CCC?
- A. I met her while I was delivering groceries, out in Pulaski Heights. She was a nursemaid out there for
- Q. What is your opinion of what the CCC has done for the country?
- A. You know those roads you drive on back in the country, those roads are still there. I think it made a lot of boys into men who turned out pretty good. I don't know really how I would have turned out if I hadn't gone to CCC camp because those boys running out on the streets, they don't know what they'll turn out to be.
- Q. Do you feel that this bill that's before Congress now to reinstate the CCC is a good bill?
- A. Well, in a way I think it would. They talk about people today can't do things we did back when we were in but I think if kids were put to the test they'd do just as good as we did.

- Q. Do you think they are desperate enough?
- A. Well, if they got in the fix we were in I think they would be. I imagine you know of some kids that have been in some things that straightened up pretty good.
- Q. Do you think they're desperate enough at this point to do the hard work that had to be done?
- A. Yes, I think if they were put to the test and had to, yes. People say, I used to do this, and I used to do that, and I don't think they could do very much. Well, I was talking to a man yesterday and he said I wonder what the kids today would do if they had to go through what we had to go through, but put to the test they'd come through it just like we did. Some good and some bad. They talk about kids today being different than they were then and really I feel though we didn't have dope around, we had whisky and brew before it was legalized.
- Q. Did you see a lot of drinking?
- A. I didn't see a lot of it in CCC camp, I saw it out of it. You saw it then like you see it now only they're a little bit more open with it. When I was at Crystal Springs there was a bootlegger and there was a spring come out the side of a hill kind of a waterfall, and we went over there and sat around that waterfall and that bootlegger had his home brew in there cooling it off. What's the difference in drinking home brew? Course I realize dope and stuff like that is dangerous. I hate it. But we didn't have it in those days, just whisky and home brew, so we wouldn't be any different. I hate the way some people use it.
- Q. Did you see people who did not succeed in the CCC?
- A. You ask me a question I don't exactly remember, but in any line of work there is always somebody that doesn't succeed. I don't remember any specific thing.
- Q. I've asked you a lot of questions now, is there anything I haven't asked you that you'd like to talk about?
- A. Well, I don't know of anything, of course when I get home I might think of something. I think I've told you how the kitchen was, I never went out on the road very much.
- Q. What was the funniest thing that ever happened to you?
- A. I remember one time I was mess sergeant down at St. Charles camp and I was showing a KP around the sterilizer there and I was telling him how to operate it, standing in front of him, and I said, don't open the door like this, and I opened the door and I scalded my face. I was doing what I told him not to do! We played jokes on people, short-sheeting them, and things like that. Once I was through taking a shower, and was drying off, and this fellow got this old water that had been up there no telling how long and threw it on me, and I just turned around and took another shower and didn't say a word. I was cooking that day, and went back up to the kitchen and I sent one of the KP's down there and had him tell what ever his name was this sink's stopped up. In the meantime I'd set a pitcher there on the drainboard and I had some stuff in it, and he came up there and he was working on it and I went ahead and poured that pitcher on him. He didn't say a word, went down and took him a shower. And just things like that.
- Q. Did you ever have any serious accidents?
- A. Nothing outside of scalding my face.
- Q. Was it a pretty safe outfit?
- A. Well, they had rules and regulations just like all the rest of the government. When I was at Ashdown they needed a truck driver down at Little Rock

and they took a fellow down there to take a truck driving test and couldn't pass it, and I was down there, I don't know what I was down there for, and to get the truck back to camp the commanding officer, he couldn't drive, he wasn't supposed to, so they had to have somebody to pass the test, so he got me to take the test and drive the truck back to camp. I was mess sergeant then. So I took the test and passed it - that's where I got my truck driver's license.

Q. I'd like to know more about the floating CCC.

A. That was the only one in the United States that I know of, and when I went down there it was at St. Charles itself, and then they took it up on what they called Big Island Shoe.

Q. Where is St. Charles?

A. It's about 25 miles south of DeWitt on the White River. They took it up there, and they worked on the game and fish and stuff like that, they made creosote ties and I don't know what all they did because I didn't work out in the field but I know how come they got that big refuge down there now because the CCC camp made it. They did all the work. Of course they've improved it some since then but they really started it out.

Q. How long were you in that floating camp?

A. About a year, because they busted up and went over to a land camp because they were doing the same kind of work. The CCC was kind of tapering off about that time, about 37 or 38.

Q. Why did they call it the floating CCC?

A. You were on the water. They had big barracks with upstairs and downstairs and kitchen and the whole works was on water. The foreman for the refuge, there's was on land but as far as the CCC part it was on water. It was a big barge, with a 2-story barracks on it.

Q. How many men were assigned to it?

A. There were about 200 in every CCC camp. ^{to start,} Every six months they would come back up to 200. During the six months some would quit, it would generally be down to 150-160 at the end of six months.

Q. How big was this floating camp?

A. It was about 7 or 8 barges, two stories high. They had an office, and a storage room where they kept all your clothes and they had one for the kitchen. The barges were about 60 feet long, maybe longer. They had about 35-40 men on each floor.

Q. What did they do for recreation?

A. We'd go up on the bank there, and we'd fish off of there. Of course you weren't allowed to hunt the squirrels or nothing, but you could go right there on deck and see 40 or 50 squirrels playing around out there. People got caught shooting them once in awhile, but I never did shoot one because I didn't have a gun. I wouldn't have shot one anyway, I didn't have a way to cook it unless I took it in the kitchen and then I sure enough would have been caught.

Q. I'm sort of backtracking here a little bit, but the food that you cooked, was it all brought to you?

A. Well, we had a storeroom as far as canned goods and non-perishables were stored, and we'd order that once a month, from headquarters here in Little Rock. They had a big warehouse just like Safeway's got. Course it wouldn't be as big. As far as meat was concerned, you'd order that every thirty days and the company you ordered it from would see that you got it. And the milk and bread were delivered every day. The perishable stuff was

delivered to you. It was bid on by companies. We got a lot of our stuff from a company in St. Charles. Also some companies out of Missouri. We were close to the Missouri line.

Q. Did you have a favorite time in the CCC, or a favorite camp?

A. I guess I liked them all. They were all about the same. Sometimes the fellows I associated with I got a little closer to, but we followed each other around to three or four different camps, and the longer you were with somebody the closer you'd get.

Q. Are any of those fellows here today?

A. I think one that was a troop foreman out on the floating camp, and one that was company clerk at Solgahatchie while I was there. I feel close to them like you do old school friends. I see them once in awhile, none of them recently I don't think.

Q. Is there anything else you'd like to say? Here you have a chance to say something for people who live even hundreds of years after us.

A. All I can say about the CCC camps in this day and time is that I praise President Roosevelt for what he did in getting it started. I think it was a good thing because it took me and a lot of the boys off the streets. I know one boy that came in there at Crystal Springs that drank alcohol, and when he came out he didn't do that. People weren't any different than they are today.