

CCC LEGACY CHAPTER 123 NEWSLETTER

3412 Pleasant Run Road, Irving, Texas 75062

March 2013

Chartered: Nov. 1, 1985. **Past Presidents:** *Nelson Oats, *Harold Ballard, *W. O. Mullin, *Verle Oringderff, *Harold Trammell, *William Oakley, Frank Polenta, *S. L. Baker, *George Payne, *Harry Steinert, & *Al Clement. *deceased. **Current Officers:** President-Mike Pixler, phone contact: 817-929-1557, First Vice President-Jim Rau, phone contact: 817-367-3343, Second Vice president-Pat Mann, phone: [info later], Secretary/Treasurer- Larka Tetens, [info later], Sergeant at Arms-Troy Jones, Chaplain-Rev. James Pixler, Kitchen Committee, [Open], Historian-Ruby Pixler, Reporter at Large & Newsletter Editor-Bill Stallings, phone contact: 972-255-7237.

Monthly Meeting is held on the *second* Saturday of each month from 10:30 AM to 1PM at the North Side Multipurpose Center, 1801 Harrington [North], Fort Worth, TX 76106. Dues are \$10 a person annually and are effective from Oct. to Oct.

Directions: Interstate Hwy 30 runs east & west. It accesses the downtown Fort Worth area from the south. Exit north on Henderson St. After a couple of miles it crosses a fork of the Trinity River and becomes State Hwy 199 which goes to Lake Worth, and the Fort Worth Nature Center & Refuge. When you reach the traffic light at the intersection of 18th St. NW, turn right [east] and go up the hill four blocks to Homan St. Turn left [north], and go a block to the Y. Stay right and continue into the Center's rear parking lot. Our meeting room door with the CCC sign is to the right as you approach the building. Bring a friend & enjoy fun, fellowship & food. Sign the register for you may win the \$10 door prize.

WEDDING ANNIVERSARIES: Earnest & Lela Scarbrough, Broken Arrow, OK, 03/11, [#71!] Congratulations.
HAPPY BIRTHDAY: Houston Fruge, Sulphur, LA, 03/22; LaVaughn Greer, Crowley, TX, 03/23, Jim Rau, Fort Worth, TX, 03/20; and Ben Yung, Fort Worth, TX, 03/26.

MINUTES OF MEETING OF CCC LEGACY CHAPTER 123, ON SATURDAY, MARCH 9, 2013. Weather: Overcast and Windy, Temp 63°, Attendance: 18.

President Pixler called the meeting to order at 11:04 AM and welcomed everyone to the March meeting. The invocation was given by Merle Timblin. The pledges to our flaps were led by Sgt-at-Arms, Troy Jones. Following a reminder of the purpose of the meeting, that being continuing education of the Civilian Conservation Corps, 1933-1942, and the CCC Legacy, with emphasis on the celebration of the 80th anniversary of the CCC in 2013, and CCC Day at the FWNC&R, First Vice President Jim Rau suggested that our chapter proclaim this day to be, "Bill McKee Day." A motion was made by Larka Tetens, 2nd by Helene Hubbard; all were in favor, thereby making our 9 March, 2013, meeting, Bill McKee Day. Bill was accompanied by our newest member, Bill's daughter, Robbie McKee-Warner, from Abilene, Texas. She shared with the chapter, instead of moving to Abilene in April, as we were first told, he would be moving Thursday, 14 March, 2013. This sparked quite a conversation with the members, with several attempting to get him to stay until after the celebration 30 March, 2013. Fellow CCC Boy, Merle Timblin, told Bill, he would have to return but once a month on the 2nd Saturday, to attend the chapter meeting. Shortly after Merle making that statement, President Pixler approached him with

the possibility of him becoming the interim Secretary/Treasurer, in name only, and allow him on the signature card at the credit union. He agreed to but suggested someone else, because he and Evelyn will be moving to Wichita Falls, Texas, possibly in the fall. More to follow.

Pixler asked if all had received their newsletter with the minutes of the 9 April, 2013, meeting. All had. Jim Rau motioned to table the reading of the minutes, 2nd by Bill McKee, motion passed.

A written financial report with the current status was presented by Pixler, with a motion to accept by Merle Timblin, 2nd Troy Jones, all in favor, motion passed.

Sick call was reported by the phone committee. Pat Mann shared he was still in search of the aerial photo of Company/Camp 1816. He reported on the embers he had contacted, with a concern about CCC Boy Allen Wilkerson. Allen is able to drive and is in good physical condition, however, his wife, not so much. He will not leave her to attend the meetings because there is no one to care for her. Pat asked if anyone knew of a volunteer care group. Wanda Jones stated she knew of caretakers who would volunteer to stay with Allen's wife for a short time. She and Pat will work on that issue. More to follow. Jim Rau and Pixler shared information on newsletter editor/publisher Bill Stallings, and his continuing recovery following the surgical procedure. A "GET WELL SOON" wish to Bill comes from the chapter. Bill is missed by all. A get well soon card was signed by the members present for past secretary/treasurer, Blanche Howerton. The chapter misses her and hopes she will return soon. Rau and Pixler shared their contacts next. Pixler left several messages. A number of members have been noticeably missed from the meetings. He shared info on CCC Boy, Frank Borello of Alvin, Texas. He still bowls on Thursdays and is doing fine. He plans to attend the anniversary event in Palo Duro Canyon SP in April. Pixler shared about the visit he and Ruby Pixler made to see LaVaughn Greer. She is doing well. A social worker was with her when we arrived. She recognized Ruby immediately. We had no birthdays or anniversaries present at the meeting for March.

Old business followed with the statement from Pixler this would be the final attempt to get members to renew, maybe.

New business was next with a motion being made to reimburse Ruby Pixler for the rally towels and associated expenses she had paid for CCC Day at FWNC&R, by Merle Timblin, 2nd Larka Tetens, all in favor, motion passed. Authorization for funds, not to exceed \$300, in support of the 80th anniversary in Palo Duro Canyon SP, motioned by Troy Jones, 2nd Jim Rau, all in favor, motion passed. Following a discussion it was decided the chapter would make available for sale at the tables at FWNC&R AND Palo Duro Canyon SP, the book covers and flyers for Kathy Mays Smith.

As part of the program a discussion began about Blacks in the CCC. Jim Rau shared information to Larka and the chapter about segregation in the CCC camps with Pixler sharing there were approximately 16 "Colored" camps in the state of Texas. The differences of the camps continued with the designations: Camp, Camp - V [veterans], Camp - C [Colored].

Pass the Can and the drawing was next. Pat Mann won the \$10 door prize, 2nd month in a row, and again returned to the treasury. Thanks Pat.

Prior to the members preparing for the meal and the blessing offered by Merle, it was asked of Larka Tetens to serve as interim Secretary/Treasurer and be included on the signature cards at the credit union. A motion was made by Bill McKee, 2nd by Troy Jones, 17 for, 1 against [Larkin Dilbeck], motion carried. Thanks Larka. More to follow.

Motion to adjourned by Jim Rau, 2nd by Merle Timblin, we adjourned at 12:15 PM.

A wonderful meal was enjoyed by all.

Respectfully submitted for Secretary/Treasurer,

Mike Pixler, President

News from Our Poet Laureate

We recently had occasion to talk with our Jack Bragg to see how he is doing. He has been feeling a little stronger lately; still has his good and bad days, but doing some better. No, he has no new poems for us yet, but hopes to soon. What he has been doing when he feels like it, is working on getting a group of about 70 poems together to be published soon. I think we may have mentioned in our last issue that his son, Jack Bragg, Jr. was helping him to illustrate the publication. We had that wrong. His son, who is a Chief in the Dallas Police Department, is pushing his father to also do the illustrations as well as the poems. It seems that Jack Sr. was a commercial art director and artist back in his working life. He headed the art work for the regional advertising department of the Montgomery Ward Department Store. He traveled the southwest region of Wards doing store displays and newspaper ads. At one time he was given a first place award for his art work. At another time he did work for J.C. Penny's Stores. It never ceases to amaze the varied and quite remarkable stories this small group of people of CCC Legacy Chapter 123 bring to the table.

We Hear From a Member in Mineral Wells, Texas

The other day we had occasion to talk with Emma Jean Getsko of Mineral Wells who called to let us know she definitely wanted to renew her membership in our group that meant so much to her father, a CCC Boy. She gladly shared some information about him.

Her father, John J. Warren, was born on November 23, 1917, and grew up in Mineral Wells. At age eighteen he joined the CCC in 1935 and was sent to Elephant Butte Lake in New Mexico on the Rio Grande north of Las Cruces, Company 3830, Camp BR 54N [Bureau of Reclamation]. They built, among other things, a fish hatchery on the lake. In 1936 John was sent to Ysleta, Texas, Company 1854, Camp BR-4, doing work on irrigation projects in the Lower Valley of the Rio Grande SE of El Paso. Next he went to Company 3829, Camp BR-39N at Las Cruces, New Mexico, in 1937, again working for the Bureau of Reclamation. At this time they were building Box Canyon Dam and Apache Dam, both as flood control projects. Finally in 1938 John was sent back to Elephant Butte, N.M., to Company 855, BR-54, to build roads and cabins for visitors to the park areas on Elephant Butte Lake.

His daughter tells us that he did quite a variety of jobs while in the CCC. At the Isleta, Texas, project he dug gophers out of the irrigation canals which were causing drainage problems. He drove a truck. He told her of one instance where he had a load of the boys behind him, going down a steep grade, when the brakes failed. The guys were hollering and scared, but he managed to keep the truck upright and managed to stop it by going up the other side of that steep grade to lose momentum. He worked in the kitchen; he became a camp medic. In his job as a medic, he had a lot of free time in camp with no one else around, so he learned to be quite a good pool player. He probably made a few extra bucks off his buddies this way.

After his CCC days, John joined the Texas National Guard and was in a Horse Cavalry outfit. Too bad we don't have his stories of that experience! Most people are unaware that the Horse Cavalry was still a big part of the U.S. Army, right up to the beginning of World War II. In fact, the officers and men of the Cavalry were known as the elite units of the Army. Just before the war, John became a tank commander as his unit became mechanized. By the time the U.S. entered WW II, John was married with several children, so was not subject to be called up. However, he still wanted to enlist, but his wife nixed that idea.

John worked at a bank for 20 years, and also worked at Convair in Fort Worth and lived in White

Settlement. While here, he looked forward to coming to the CCC Chapter 123 meetings, but could not get his wife to go with him. They eventually moved back to Mineral Wells, but he liked to go to as many reunions as he could. At age 90, even though not well, he had to go to the one at Bastrop SP. While there he got caught in the rain and got soaked. He came down with pneumonia and died soon after the meeting. We thank Jean for sharing his story.

WE RESUME OUR STORY OF LARKIN DILBECK WITH THE GERMAN ATTACK IN THE ARDENNES:

They spent over a month in Belgium until December 18, 1944, when the Germans broke through the Ardennes Forest. Larkin had been detailed to go pick up a load of coal for the coming winter. When he got back, his buddies said, "Come on, we have to go get a tank and head for battle!" The next day, the 19th, when they got to the depot where tanks and ground equipment were stored, they found there were not enough tanks; it proved to be just a repair depot. They got the only one available, and it had been around since D-Day. It still had the floatation device attached but not inflated, and they weren't sure the gun would work. The day after, they got a better tank though. From here on Larkin changed from a company clerk to a tanker with absolutely no prior training, and one of five in a Sherman Tank. His job being the bow gunner, meant he sat in front next to the driver manning a machine gun. They were told to go to a nearby town [Larkin doesn't remember the name] where the Germans had taken a castle and were using it as an advance headquarters. The Germans had murdered 150 American GIs they had captured there. Larkin's unit tried to take the castle, but the Germans proved too strong, so they pulled back. Three American tanks had been knocked out and were blocking the road; one of them having the tank tracks blown off by a mine. That night Capt. C.B. Berry, Larkin's 'C' Company commander, by himself, crawled through the enemy lines, circled behind the castle, and noted where all the German tanks, big guns and equipment were located. Capt. Berry got in touch with their infantry detachment to join him because he found a road going over a large hump, which they could use to surprise the Germans and take the castle from the rear. This they did, however, the castle changed hands two or three times that same day. [Larkin explains at this point that their outfit, the 740th Tank Battalion was called a "bastard" outfit because they were sent anywhere they could be used and were often broken up and attached to whoever needed them and their tanks. In this particular engagement, they had been attached to the 119th Infantry Regiment of the 30th Armored Division.]

On the morning of 23 December, 1944, Larkin was in the lead tank of three that were supposed to take a small crossroad village. When they rounded a curve in the road and came in full view of the town, they were shocked to see three German tanks on a hill above, with their guns pointed directly at them! Larkin's driver threw the tank in reverse and hastily backed around the curve and out of sight of those tanks. There were thick hedges on either side of the road blocking their vision, so they cautiously crept back toward the town again; still not drawing any fire. As they got closer they saw that most of the few buildings in the town had been turned to rubble. After realizing the German tanks were not manned, Larkin and others started investigating what was left of the town. He approached the exposed basement of one of the houses where he found it full of dead and dying German soldiers; the ones still alive begging for water. Larkin only had his canteen with him and could not afford to give any to them, so he had to just walk away. He then approached a two story building that was still standing for the most part. It looked like a city hall of sorts. On entering he found a middle aged Belgian man and a young teen aged girl lying dead on a billiard table. They found no Germans there, but on walking out a

rear door into a small orchard out back, they found seven dead American soldiers scattered among the trees. They later learned that American artillery had zeroed in on this village the night before which would account for all the devastation. They had no way of knowing if the GIs had been killed before by the Germans or been killed during the shelling. Larkin entered another house to check it out and found a German shepherd dog, the only uninjured being around. It appeared lost and confused, but when he approached the dog, it bared its teeth and growled. Larkin had his pistol out, but said he wanted no war with the dog, so slowly backed out of the house.

They stayed in this village for two or three days, and on Christmas Day of 1944, Larkin's tank unit was served a hot meal; their first in over a week. It was a full Christmas dinner complete with turkey, potatoes, gravy, and the works. They ate it out of their mess kits. They had been living in their tanks from the 19th to the 25th of December.

On 3 January, 1945, they regrouped again and started for the front. From then on for the next five weeks or so until the 28th of January, it was just a day to day push and shove, when the Battle of the Bulge was called officially ended. New units had been brought in to help; including Patton's Army to relieve the Bastogne area. At the time their unit had entered the ruined village, Larkin's tank unit had been attached to the 82th Airborne Division commanded by General Gavin, the youngest Major General in the U.S. Army. He had designed what came to be known as "the leap frog attack," in which their tank unit would be attached to one infantry regiment one day and attack the Germans. This regiment would then rest for a day, while another regiment would move through during the night and keep attacking the Germans and so on. However, Larkin's tank unit had no rest breaks; they had to stay on the line and support each succeeding infantry unit. Larkin says in this way, they lost a lot of tanks and a lot of men in the Battle of the Bulge. Larkin says his luck held though; he was in no bad scrapes during this time after the incident at the small village. He and his tank were spared.

Next Larkin's unit was assigned to take The Siegfried Line. Their job was to break through this concrete barrier wall built in sections across western Germany; some of it dated back to World War I. The wall alternated with concrete tank traps called "Dragons Teeth," consisting of a series of rows of block-like structures two to three feet high. After getting through this obstacle, their next objective was to get across the Ruhr River. There was a lake on the river created by a dam and it was full due to recent heavy rains. The Germans blew up one end of the dam, hoping to trap the Americans in the flooded area. The Americans learned of this in time, and so were not trapped. Larkin's unit was delayed though for several days by waiting in a wooded area for the waters to drain down. American artillery began shelling a small town on the other side of the river at night so that engineers could install a temporary bridge for tanks and troops to cross. They used light pontoon boats to carry each bridge section into place. Larkin's tank unit was a part of this fire support. He says they were up all night and were supposed to fire two rounds every two hours, each tank alternating fire. One reason for this was to keep the gun barrels from overheating. When they crossed this pontoon bridge, it was a scary experience; each tank weighing 40,000 lbs., the river flowing swiftly, and the bridge runners bobbing up and down. When they got into the small town on the other side, they found it was abandoned and their unit regrouped. From here they had to cross a wide open area to get to the next town. In this movement, Larkin's tank was the second one in a line of five tanks. Before they knew it, the Germans had knocked out the three tanks behind them! Each tank had five men, and out of fifteen, seven had been killed outright. There was a big levee in front of their two tanks blocking their forward movement and so were trapped in this exposed position. Also the lead tank's main gun and one machine gun were jammed. Two German soldiers came over the levee with a bazooka to knock them out. The sergeant in the lead tank got out and started firing his sub-machine gun at them; at which the Germans dropped their bazooka and ran off. This all started about 1:00 PM, and then it started to get dark, all this time

Larkin and the others couldn't figure why the Germans had not knocked their tanks out also; expecting it at any time. Finally a sergeant in another tank platoon, and advancing up another road, spotted the German gun that had knocked out their tanks. The gun was dug down into the levee far enough that its traverse was restricted; blocking it from aiming at Larkin's and the front tank. The sergeant's tank managed to knock out the German gun. Then Larkin's and the other tank got around the burned out tanks to get back and regroup with what was left of their unit.

While this had been going on, the rest of their tanks and the 82nd Airborne finished breaking through their sector of the Siegfried Line. When Larkin's group rejoined them, they proceeded on towards Cologne and Dusseldorf. First they had to cross the Rhine River, a really big and wide river. It was much scarier than crossing the Ruhr because it was swifter and wilder. The pontoon sections would drop down under the weight of the tank right to the water, and the bridge sections ahead would bulge up ahead and block most forward vision. They did not run into any resistance upon entering either Cologne or Dusseldorf; the Germans had pulled out to keep the cities from being destroyed.

After this, their unit got orders to board a train; the tanks were put on flat cars and the men in box cars. They traveled all day and a night into southern Germany, into France again, and then back into Germany in order to break through another part of the Siegfried Line. For this one battle they were attached to the Seventh Army. This was in March of 1945. Larkin was in the lead tank as they got into the Line, and they were going down a road, when they came to a large section of it that was blown out and blocking their way. Their platoon lieutenant was riding in Larkin's tank, and he got out to confer with an infantry lieutenant; all the while heavy German artillery fire was dropping around them. One shell made a direct hit on their tank turret, instantly killing the two men behind Larkin and the driver and setting the tank on fire. Larkin immediately realized what had happened and told the driver, "Let's get out of here!" Larkin threw his hatch open and lifted himself out of the burning tank. His left wrist was burned and he thought his left ear drum had been destroyed by the concussion. He had no feeling in his left leg; he thought it was gone. He pulled himself into a ditch to get away from the tank. Here he got up nerve to look down at that leg and found it was still there. He had on coveralls over his fatigues, and they were covered with blood, flesh, and splinters of bone from the two that were killed. He stripped off the coveralls, left them in the ditch, then got up and walked away. He then saw the driver had gotten out also, but his face was badly burned. The driver was sent back to the rear; his fighting days were over. Larkin and the lieutenant were the only two survivors of that tank that returned to battle later. Looking back, Larkin believes that when the lieutenant got out of the tank, he left the top hatch open and the shell went straight down into the turret. Either that or the hatch, having less armor, so it could be opened, was not able to stop the shell.

This lieutenant had a tough reputation; behind his back the men called him 'Bull Dog Shaw.' Later, when replacement GIs came into the unit, Lieutenant Shaw asked Larkin if he would take the job of gun loader in the turret next to the gunner. There wasn't much room in there, and Larkin was a little smaller than the new replacement that came in. Larkin said, "It was OK by me, let's just get the job done." After this the lieutenant apparently took a liking to Larkin and treated him as an equal. While they were recuperating in the rear area, the lieutenant asked Larkin to go for a walk with him. The officer had picked up a German P-38 pistol and wanted to try it out. They came to a ravine and there was a German helmet laying there. He shot at it but missed. Larkin had his big heavy .45 pistol, took aim and flipped the helmet over. Lt. Shaw fired again and missed again. This time Larkin put a hole in it. The lieutenant said lets trade guns. Using the .45 he missed again. Larkin, this time with the P-38, put a pretty good crease in the helmet. Lt. Shaw then said, "Let's head back to camp."

We will conclude Larkin's story in the next issue.

The Civilian Conservation Corps Legacy is a non-profit organization dedicated to research, preservation, and education to promote better understanding of the CCC and its continuing contribution to American life and culture. *"I propose to create a Civilian Conservation Corps to be used in simple work, more important, however, than the material gains will be the moral and spiritual value of such work."*

--FDR, 1933

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