Interview with Charlie Davis
Date: March 13, 1999
Interviewer: Judy Ehrlich, Rick Tejada-Flores
Camera Rolls:
Sound Rolls:

Interview gathered as part of "The Good War and Those Who Refused to Fight It: The Story of World War II Conscientious Objectors". Produced by Paradigm Productions. Housed at the Washington University Film and Media Archive, Paradigm Productions Collection.

Interview with Charlie Davis, conducted by Paradigm Productions on March 13, 1999, for "The Good War and Those Who Refused to Fight It: The Story of World War II Conscientious Objectors". Washington University Libraries, Film and Media Archive, Paradigm Productions Collection.

Note: These transcripts contain material that did not appear in the final program. Only text appearing in bold italics was used in the final version of "The Good War and Those Who Refused to Fight It: The Story of World War II Conscientious Objectors".

00:00:11:00—00:00:41:00

Camera Crew Member #1:

[laughs]

[sound is one channel]

Interviewer #1:

You ready?

Camera Crew Member #2:

Not quite.

[sound expands to both channels]

Interviewer #1:

Actually, we probably need to get a voice level.

Interviewer #2:

[coughing]

Charlie Davis:

OK.

Interviewer #1:

Go ahead and just introduce yourself, we're almost—

Charlie Davis:

OK. I'm Charlie Davis.

Interviewer #1:

You OK? [pause] Just—

Camera Crew Member #2:

Yes.

Interviewer #1:

—waiting for sound to be—

Camera Crew Member #2:

Uh-huh.

Interviewer #1:

—all right?

Charlie Davis:

I'm not now, nor never have I been a member of the communist party.

Interviewer #2:

Mm.

Interviewer #1:

Good, we've got that on tape.

Interviewer #2:

[coughs]

Interviewer #1:

I feel much better. We're [laughs], tell us when we're ready, Nick.

Camera Crew Member #1:

That's all we want.

Interviewer #1:

OK? You're OK, Vicente?

Interviewer #2:

OK.

Interviewer #1:

Everybody's cool? OK? So we'll start, oh—

00:00:42:00—00:03:26:00

Interviewer #2:

Sorry, but Charlie you are, you would describe yourself as a conscientious objector? What do-, what does that word mean to you, and why did you become one?

Interviewer #1:

[sneezes] Excuse me. [sneezes] All right. [sneezes] Sorry.

Camera Crew Member #2:

Bless you.

Charlie Davis:

I was a conscience, -tious objector to war, and—

Interviewer #2:

Start, start over again. One more time—

Charlie Davis:

Oh—

Interviewer #2:

—go ahead.

Charlie Davis:

—I was a conscience, conscientious objector to war, and I became one because I refused to kill people in behalf of the state. I reached that conclusion after considerable trauma. In 1940, '41, the, the choice of whether or not to request a conscientious objector status was something that was before me, and I concluded that the alternatives were unacceptable. I finally had to face the question, after considerable floundering, when I was a civilian employee of the United States Navy, and my draft board sent a letter to my, as it happened, my commanding officer, man in charge of the cost inspection program where I was working. And I asked them whether I was qualified to be a, a CO, and he did an interview with me, and sent them a letter which said, in effect, this man should be deferred. I don't know whether he said, because I wouldn't be any good as a, a, a, a warrior, but he said, this fellow is not going to fight. And shortly after that I got my classification. Now, this was not the result of a lot of religious thought, although at the time, the Presbyterian minister of the church I was going to encouraged me, and as it happens, my mother was a member of the Christadelphian religious group, and she did not discourage me, though she didn't particularly, in any, press the issue with me. So that's what it meant, and that's, I think, how I got there. If I reflected back on all of the factors, there'd probably would be some aspect of, of rebellion going on at that point. But the fact that I was floundering probably was fairly typical of a good many people.

Interviewer #2:

But what does that mean? I mean it's—

[cut]

00:03:27:00—00:06:55:00

Camera Crew Member #1:

Rolling.

Interviewer #2:

OK. Yeah, so talk about—

Charlie Davis:

Yeah.

Interviewer #2:

—the internal dialogue—

Charlie Davis:

Well—

Interviewer #2:

—in your head.

Charlie Davis:

—I was [pause] sure that I did not want to be part of a military program in which people were going to be killed by virtue of having been on one side or the other. And I thought that war was wasteful and immoral. But the question is, how can I be part of a country where people are being drafted to defend that country, and not shirk my responsibility? This ki-, this kind of turmoil. All my s-, my friends in college, my associates, were figuring out what to do, and that conversation went on for a long time. But in my, the problem in my head was, how can I find a, a role to play that will accommodate my reluctance, my unwillingness, to be part of a killing machine, and yet maintain some responsibility f-, so far as the state is concerned? And that boiled down to a decision when I had to face the fact that I was not going to continue working for the Navy. Indeed, my commanding officer indicated that he was sure I would qualify for civilian work, as it were, with the Navy, I suppose doing pencil pushing or something of that sort. And I, at that point, decided, know what, this is crazy, you've d-, made the decision, you have to fa-, you, you, you, you cannot accommodate a, a compromise. And that's the, the, the place I came down. My position hardened after I was drafted, that is, I mo-, became more certain of my position after I was drafted, because I received hysterical letters from, for instance, my, my minister who, who had been a, a counselor and a supporter in the Presbyterian church when I was going through this. I received a blood-curdling letter from him, saying that the attack on Pearl Harbor made him a warrior, when, in reality, anybody who was walking the streets of Long Beach, California, or, or listening to occasional radio broadcasts, had no basis to be surprised by the, the attack on Pearl Harbor. They might have had a basis for being surprised about where it came, but the, it was clear that war, but, but beginning in the, I think the early 1940s, it was clear that the war was evolving. The work I was doing with the Navy was in connection with military equipment that was being sent to the South Pacific, so that people who came back at me and said, how could you not change when the war started? Well, it started only, started two days after I was in, in CO camp, and I didn't see any change in my expectation from that. [pause] I—

00:06:56:00—00:07:49:00

Interviewer #1:

Would you—

Charlie Davis:

Yeah.

Interviewer #1:

—just restate that, the, what you just said. I—

Charlie Davis:

Uh...

Interviewer #1:

—thought that was important, it, would you just restate what—

Charlie Davis:

That the war—

Interviewer #2:

Well, just—

Charlie Davis:

—the war—

Interviewer #2:

—start out by saying, I got into CO camp and two d-, two days later, Pearl Harbor—

Charlie Davis:

Yeah.

Interviewer #2:

—happened, and it didn't change, so it—

Charlie Davis:

Yeah.

Interviewer #2:

—so we, so we know where you are.

Charlie Davis:

Yeah, all right. I got into, I was dra-, I wa-, I took the train from Los Angeles, I think on the third of December, 1941, arrived at Cascade Locks on the fifth of December, and the seventh of December, Pearl Harbor was bombed. The, that experience didn't change my view of, of my responsibility to my conscience at all, because I, I took the position the first place that war was coming, and I was going to resist participation, and the fact that it arrived in this particular way didn't, didn't have any influence.

00:07:50:00—00:09:22:00

Interviewer #1:

Did you know other COs when you became a CO?

Charlie Davis:

[pause] No. I did discover that there were four or five men that I had known in, at University of Southern California at the time, who were COs almost immediately after we arrived in camp, one fellow that I knew quite well, that we, I'd never discussed the matter with him. As a matter of fact, I had, a, a family I was living with in college had friends who were Quakers, and I attended some meetings of the Quaker club at USC, and found that the conversations were all too ethereal for me, but I, as I recall, I was the only one who became a CO of that group. But, the, the, I, I didn't at the time—well, at the time, I thought a good many of my fellow students at USC would be COs, because in our conversation, this position had always been one that said, I'm not sure, but I th-, I think that's where I am now. But at the time, I didn't know anybody who was a CO. I had no idea what I was getting into when I—except in a general sense that I was being sent up to Oregon.

00:09:23:00—00:10:27:00

Interviewer #1:

Did that seem like an opportunity to you, to do work of national importance in, a-, as an alternative, and—

Charlie Davis:

Ye-, ye—

Interviewer #1:

—did you look at that favorably—

Charlie Davis:

Ye-, yes—

Interviewer #1:

—somehow?

Charlie Davis:

—I, very much so. I, I thought that the initial experience would be, with the expectation that at some point I would be part of an organization doing relief work unrelated to a military operation someplace. And that was largely as a result of receiving letters from the Brethren Service Committee, when I was assigned to, to the camp at Cascade Locks, which was administered by the service committee. And I thought that the work to be done in the Forest Service, the work to bene-, be, be done in the Columbia Gorge, would be work that was understood, useful to do. But I also thought that that would be a preliminary to other responsibilities that might come later.

00:10:28:00—00:12:09:00

Interviewer #1:

So your—

Interviewer #2:

[coughs]

Interviewer #1:

—your actual correspondence from the Brethren led you to believe you would, this would lead into relief work.

Charlie Davis:

Oh—

Interviewer #1:

Overseas relief work? Or was—

Charlie Davis:

Yes. Well, their expect-, their hope was, and I think expressed in the introductory letter, was that as the military operations ceased, around the world, that hospital units and ambulance units would be set up, and feeding programs would, would evolve. And the historic peace churches became administrators of the program because of that hope and expectation, which the Selective Service administration encouraged. They may have encouraged it for, for reasons of their self-interest, or they may have encouraged it thinking. Actually, self-interest? Maybe they were encouraging it to keep the historic peace churches in line; or maybe, at that point, they thought this would be a good way to use these fellows, as some of the COs in World War One were used in, ambulance units and so on.

Interviewer #1:

Mm. Mm-hmm.

Charlie Davis:

But [clears throat], you asked the question whether I thought it was an opportunity, and the answer is, is yes, I thought it was going to be an opportunity. I thought it would be an opportunity that would last for several years, and then, like people who are drafted into the military service, I would get on with my life.

00:12:10:00—00:12:29:00

Interviewer #1:

And how long did it last?

Charlie Davis:

Last, it lasted four years and sixteen days, as I recall.

Interviewer #1:

[laughs]

Interviewer #2:

And, and, and that expectation really turned around, so, so looking back, you and a lot of other C—

[cut]

00:12:30:00—00:13:08:00

Charlie Davis:

—university, and—

Interviewer #1:

Right. Right.

Camera Crew Member #1:

OK, rolling.

Interviewer #2:

So, Charlie, just, you know, give us the other side of the coin. As long as you talked about your expectations—

Interviewer #1:

Could we just get him to do that one sentence, first?

Interviewer #2:

OK, sure—

Charlie Davis:

Oh, OK.

Interviewer #2:

—fine, but I—

Charlie Davis:

Well—

Interviewer #2:

[unintelligible]

Charlie Davis:

—clearly, when I decided to be a CO, I did not know anybody else who was, who became a CO. I didn't, from my discussion with my fellow students at USC, I didn't think my position was totally unique. I thought some of them would be COs, but I didn't know anybody who had actually signed the documents, filled out the forms, and had qualified for a CO position.

00:13:09:00—00:15:19:00

Interviewer #1:

Good. OK, go on.

Charlie Davis:

OK.

Interviewer #2:

So, I just wanted to talk about, you know, the hindsight about, you know, going in hoping you would do relief work, [audio volume raises] hoping that you would really do something significant, and [audio volume lowers] at the end of the experience looking back from the other end, you, you [audio volume raises] have a rather negative idea about [audio volume lowers] what the whole camp thing was about, what Selective Service was, was trying to do. I mean—

Charlie Davis:

Yeah.

Interviewer #2:

—how did you look at in hindsight?

Charlie Davis:

In hindsight, I looked at it as kind of a [sic] administrative muddle in which the historic peace churches, for reasons that I honor, and people with every quality of integrity, entered into a deal with the s-, Selective Service system in which they got the short end of the stick, as it were. Selective Service had total control, and it exercised total control throughout the war to achieve the result of keeping things quiet, basically, and not allowing the historic peace churches t-, to do what would have been intelligent to allow them to do. Looking back on it, the churches made too many compromises, some of the compromises made it, made them appear dishonest, and encouraged some bitterness, which I don't feel, but I understand. The contribution that one might make over time, mainly is having said, no, and that's the significant contribution. Side contributions I think have been very significant, as well, that, of the mental hospital programs—

[dog barks]

Charlie Davis:

—some of the forest service research programs have been very important.

[dog continues barking]

Charlie Davis:

And, of course, the, the smokejumpers, the work done in, in other—

Interviewer #2:

[coughs]

—hospitals, and, that was important—

Interviewer #1:

Dog. We have to redo this.

[production discussion]

Camera Crew Member #2:

It's the dog barking—

Charlie Davis:

OK.

[cut]

00:15:20:00—00:17:26:00

Charlie Davis:

And that's—

Interviewer #1:

Yeah.

Charlie Davis:

—it's still going on, International Heifer pro-, program at—

Interviewer #1:

That's, go ahead. We don't know about that one.

Charlie Davis:

OK.

Interviewer #1:

We're, you know, there's just lots of fodder here—

Charlie Davis:

OK.

Interviewer #1:

—for our—

Charlie Davis:

Yeah. Shall I talk about some now?

Interviewer #1:

Yeah. Sure.

Charlie Davis:

OK, well, there are small things that may not come, one may not recognize, that people did. People from CO camps who, after the war, went to be missionaries in Africa, or in India, or other places, and worked through a chaotic world in, to, order to bring some benefit to the people living there. In some cases, that, of course, has been wiped out by revolution and was ineffective. The, a project in, tha-, that began with a Brethren minister, who happened to visit and be with us at Cascade Locks for several months, by the name of Dan West, is still in operation. That's the Heifer Project. Dan decided that, after the war, an intelligent thing to do would be take heifers to Europe, and some COs, who were not married at the time, were able to become seaborne cowboys, attending the needs of the heifers while they were in transit. Now that program is operated out of, I believe, it's the International Heifer program at Little Rock, Arkansas, and animals of various sorts, I say llamas, rabbits, chickens, heifers, are purchased and shipped to other countries as a way of having families in other countries have an animal that will help sup-, support them, and enable them to give the offsprings [sic] of the animals to friends and neighbors, teaching them how to, to care for 'em. I think that is, possibly, those are kind of significant events that may not be earthshaking, that may not be interesting for writing a book. But in terms of changing people's lives, pretty significant.

00:17:27:00—00:19:52:00

Interviewer #1:

Mm-hmm. H-, how about the mental health reforms? Is that a major thing in—

Charlie Davis:

I—

Interviewer #1:

—your mind?

Charlie Davis:

—no question about that, as well. I think the mental health reform, the fact that the situation that we found in 1942 in mental hospitals is almost impossible to communicate to folks when you see the effect of, particularly the effect, of course, of drug, the effect of the argument over whether people should be abused into conformity, or whether they should be treated for their illnesses. And the change, I think, has been very much for the best, as we have drugs available. The aspect of change that has not been very good, of course, is that there's no help at all today for persons—

[distant vehicle reverse beeps]

—who are mentally ill, ex-, except to throw them in jail or to confine them to the streets as, as homeless person. But the, the reforms, partic—well, the reforms that resulted from correspondence between CPS units, saying here are some things that work, here are some things that don't work; and, of course, the [clears throat], what was called the conspiracy of COs to let the public know how bad things were, and to have some effective work in, in some states to, to change-spur. I think of the Byberry Hospital, the Cleveland State Hospital, the changes that were major—terms of hospital administrators being fired, congressional investigations, and, and so on—had an effect on all the hospitals across the country. And in, in addition, it, it, it seemed to me it gave an opportunity to move away from staffing the hospitals with what were called bughousers, folks who were too brutal in North Dakota, in hospitals there, getting fired and moving out to hospitals in the state of Washington or down in the state of Oregon after they w-, had been discovered as really more cl-, criminally inclined than any of the—

[loud popping]

Charlie Davis:

—patients.

00:19:53:00—00:19:57:00

Interviewer #1:

What was—

Interviewer #2:

—wha' was that?

Interviewer #1:

—that?

Camera Crew Member #1:

Wow.

Interviewer #2:

Huh. I don't know. But [clears throat] Charlie, when we were—

Interviewer #1:

[laughs]

[cut]

00:19:58:00—00:22:47:00

Interviewer #2:

—you know, you were saying that you were involved with mental health, you—

Charlie Davis:

Yeah.

Interviewer #2:

—but at the same time you're saying, you're saying, well, I'm not a mental health professional, I'm not an expert. So what, and I don't think any of the COs who worked in the hospitals were mental health professionals, so what was it that—

Interviewer #1:

[sneezes]

[beeps]

Interviewer #2:

—a conscientious objector would bring —

Interviewer #1:

[sneezes]

Interviewer #2:

—to a mental hospital that could actually contribute?

Camera Crew Member #2:

[clears throat]

Charlie Davis:

Well, at, at, at that time, I would guess that any CO that went on the ward of any mental hospital in the country would be, would have a higher standard of ethics than anybody employed in that hospital. We're talking—that, that's a broad statement, I might have to, I, I would have some difficulty assuring that that's correct, but the bughousers were very undesirable people, and the hospital administrators, when they, they, they couldn't employ better folk—because people with better, who had better jobs were off doing something else—they would hire, they would hire the best they could, which was not good, very bad. And the hospital administrators would adjust to it, and become callous about it. And whole sections of hospitals would just be horrible places, so—as indicated by subsequent filming by the, for, for movies, as well as for congressional investigations. But the second thing, by and large, we brought was a much more highly educated cadre. There was probably in the hospital units, I suspect there were, certainly eighty percent of the people had a college education. And then, at the hospital, the COs showed an interest in learning about mental illness. And, of course, many showed an interest about mental illness before, but responding to training was something that was very important. Even the people who, at Fort Steilacoom, who ran a farm crew, or ran a laundry crew, or a lot of other things, learned about how they conducted themselves with the patients from people who were on the wards, and I suspect that happened in hospitals all across the country, but they wouldn't have had that without having COs there.

00:22:48:00—00:26:48:00

Interviewer #1:

Two things in relation to that. One is, what's the relationship of philosophy of nonviolence to what the COs brought to the hospital? And also, if you could just describe what it looked like

when you walked in. You said it's hard to describe, but could you take a shot at, what were the conditions like?

[truck outside]

Camera Crew Member #2:

[unintelligible] we have a truck. [pause] OK, go ahead.

Interviewer #2:

Go ahead.

Charlie Davis:

The commitment of a pacifist made it impossible for one, even in the most [pause] frustrated experience, to strike a patient without feeling that that is something we don't do. I'm not aware of any occasion when a CO struck a patient at Fort Steilacoom in anger. I know occasions, many occasions, when, of course, a patient had to be restrained. But in terms of expressing anger in that way, that would've, that was recognized as something that one did not do, no matter where one came from religiously. [clears throat] Now, looking at my experience going on the wards, my first experience was, this is hardly believable. There's something I don't understand. Patients pushing floor devices—I'm, whether they were mops or something else around the, the floor of the ward all day long. And patients sitting in, in a, in a stupor without any attention at all, all day long. Patients messing themselves, and not being cleaned up. Beds unmade. And a facility where maybe you should've had twenty-five attendants for maybe fifty patients—I suspect that's probably a fair guess at what happens at hospitals now—you had one patient, one attendant for maybe 2- or 300 people. And that was not only dangerous, but—dangerous to everybody—but it was, it, it showed the inhumanity of the system at work then. And that, that, that's a long answer, but I think my sense of shock at going into a ward and knowing that people were locked in that ward—locked in permanently—and that COs went into that ward with a key and lock, a key to the lock, and then were there for the shift, sometimes without anybody else present, and ofttimes being the only humane staff person available. But it, I think it also gave me a sense that you sometimes get in life, when you start to do something and say immediately, [clears throat] I can do something about this, I can make a contribution. I know more than this, than what's happening here, and that's the sort of relationship I think many COs had when they got into mental hospitals.

00:26:49:00—00:29:46:00

Interviewer #2:

So, Charlie, I know maybe this is sort of a philosophical stretch, but, you know, you've felt that, that the COs in camps were shut away, put out of sight, and then you, you worked in a mental hospital, and you saw America treating mentally ill people the same way—let's just

lock 'em up, let's forget about 'em. Was that, I mean, I, is that the way America treated its problems during that decade? Let's just make it disappear, let's not deal with these things? Do you get, do you think that's true?

Charlie Davis:

Well, I suppose that's an—or that—I hadn't thought of it in that, in that way—

[distant clang]

Charlie Davis:

—but certainly, the value to Selective Service of getting us into a, a confined space was to get ou-, get us out of the way of the military program, and also get us out of the streets, as it were. And I don't, I, I can't think of any other event that would tie this up as getting people out of the way—

Interviewer #2:

Well, let's talk about—

Charlie Davis:

—except evacuation of the Japanese.

Interviewer #2:

I'm sorry, start over again, yeah. I interrupted—

Charlie Davis:

I—OK.

Interviewer #2:

—you. Say, say that over again. Say—

Charlie Davis:

I can't—

Interviewer #2:

—start—

Charlie Davis:

OK.

Interviewer #2:

—Selective Service put us away, and the other thing I can—

Charlie Davis:

OK. Well, I suppose that you could say that, that it was a way for the military to get problems out of the way, matters that would—well, military and the government in general, because certainly mental health facilities got the mentally ill persons off the streets and out of families and set aside, where they could be warehoused. Putting COs in, in forest camps, which was the first objective of Selective Service, got us off the streets and out of our families and set us aside. I, I think the evacuation and incarceration of persons of Japanese ancestry in 1942—of course, it involved more people than COs, it, there were only about 12,000 COs and there were ten times that many persons of Japanese ancestry. But it did serve a purpose, to be able to haul these people off and putting it, put 'em in, in camps away from the majority community. [pause] Was that an intelligent—

Interviewer #2:

No.

Charlie Davis:

—way to deal with that matter? Obviously not. But that strikes me as certainly a factor in the motivation of, of the Army in pushing for evacuation and internment.

00:29:47:00—00:31:51:00

Interviewer #1:

There's something you've, there's two things—

Camera Crew Member #2:

Two more minutes.

Interviewer #1:

—that you brought up, just a, quick questions.

Interviewer #2:

OK—

Interviewer #1:

We—

Interviewer #2:

—it's gotta be a quick one——we only have two more—

Interviewer #1:

Oh, OK—

Interviewer #2:

—we only have two more—

Interviewer #1:

—just the, the whole thing about, what you said when we were talking before, the best of times, that the 1940s—

Charlie Davis:

Yeah.

Interviewer #1:

—were the best of times, that people had something to do. You s—

Charlie Davis:

Yeah.

Interviewer #1:

—sort of broached that. Could you—

Charlie Davis:

Yeah, I—

Interviewer #1:

—talk about that—

Charlie Davis:

—well—

Interviewer #1:

—a little?

Charlie Davis:

—you realize that a fundamental attraction of participation in war is that life itself, for most of us, is pretty dull stuff, and the Depression was particularly bad for persons living at that time, and the opportunity to move in to something important, where you would count, where the, the newspapers and the radio were saying that we're all in this together; and besides that, you were making four or f—

[cut]

[end of tape]

00:30:52:00—00:31:08:00

Interviewer #2:

We'll try—

Interviewer #1:

She said you left Spain—

Interviewer #2:

—that again.

Interviewer #1

—before the draft.

Charlie Davis:

[laughs]

Interviewer #2:

To avoid—

Camera Crew Member #1:

Because I felt shitty.

Interviewer #1:

[laughs]

Camera Crew Member #1:

I'm rolling.

Interviewer #1:

So should we start the whole—

Interviewer #2:

Yes, let's, yes.

Interviewer #1:

—thing again? OK—

Interviewer #2:

Absolutely.

Interviewer #1:

—all right.

Interviewer #2:

I want to get it all in one piece.

Interviewer #1:

OK.

Charlie Davis:

You want me to talk about—

00:31:09:00-00

Interviewer #2:

Talk, talk about why people had this sense—

Charlie Davis:

OK.

Interviewer #2:

—that that was the most important thing—

Charlie Davis:

OK.

Interviewer #2:

—in their lives.

Charlie Davis:

Yeah, I, I think it's true of, of all wars that those who participate in this great, important event feel invigorated because life before that is pretty dull. And for many, many people, the terror of the Depression—in the USA, and maybe around the world—the terror was so great that an opportunity to do something that someone said was important provided great inspiration, and those who were in the military were, they understood immediately that what they were doing was important. They got in line and signed up, they went through, they got the training. Those who were working in the shipyards—maybe for the first time they'd have ever done any, any work of that sort, particularly women, who, who had opportunities that were not there before—were mak-, were making money, whereas a year before, they were almost destitute. So that those times could be seen as the best of times, just as I suspect those times, the times now, where there is fighting, appears as the best of times to people who are at war for their tribe or their country. And unfortunately, we haven't found a, an equivalent to replace the drive and energy an-, and excitement of being part of that kind of crowd. I think that's one of the things that COs missed, was being part of a big event that our fellows enjoyed, for the most part—except for the people, of course, who were on the front lines and, and, and, and shot up. But most people, I think, enjoyed that experience.

00:33:21:00—00:34:40:00

Interviewer #1:

Did you find that for you, though, there was an experience that was equivalent in some ways in that you had a, a camaraderie that was somehow—

Charlie Davis:

Well, yes, yes, of course, to some extent. The, the shared commitment to pacifism, the tryi-, the effort to understand more about how one could proceed to a nonviolent society by building a community in which there wasn't war, and in which the community could exist without a war. The cooperative movement in the country was still alive; the development of intentional communities to build farming programs and that sort of thing, to help assure that competition would not foster additional conflict. Those kinds of things that people spend a lot of time discussing. And there was some camara-, camaraderie in that. I suppose also there's lots of camaraderie in, in just being aware that you're a s-, very small minority, and the majority don't like you very much.

00:34:41:00—00:36:00:00

Interviewer #1:

Talk about that. Did you, in your own life, experience evidence the majority didn't like you very much for taking that position?

Charlie Davis:

No. [pause] I was, I have not been in the, in a field where the—a public body, at the time I was getting out of camp, a public body decided whether I would be allowed to teach again, or whether I'd be allowed to go back on, on civil service, or not. Incidentally, after I got out of camp, I received a notice from the US Navy that my status as an employee had been upgraded because of, of my having been an employee of the, a, a civilian employee of the Navy in 1941, and in 1945, or something like that, they sent me a note, upgrading my status. [laughs] I didn't take advantage of that, but [laughs] I was pleased that I had done good work and they, they apparently lost me in the process. There are lots of Charles Davis's, so they had probably lost me in the process.

00:36:01:00—00:38:19:00

Interviewer #2:

Charlie?

Charlie Davis:

Yeah?

Interviewer #2:

But back to this theme of, you know, the importance of the experience, and—

Charlie Davis:

Uh-huh.

Interviewer #2:

—and obviously, the experience was different for the rest of the country than for the guys in Cascade—

Charlie Davis:

Yeah.

Interviewer #2:

—Locks, or Fort Steilacoom. [pause] Was, in, in terms of your own personal life, was that period—that, that camaraderie, living out your values—was that important in shaping your life and making you who are you?

Charlie Davis:

[pause] Yeah—well, it's important in, in shaping my life, making me who I am. Some of these things are—

Interviewer #2:

You need to say, could, aga-, again, my question. S-, say, the, what I went through as a CO—

Charlie Davis:

OK. Well, what I went through as a CO affected my life significantly, how much I brought to it from who I was before. For instance, how much rebellion I had to work out that I would have tried to work out someplace else. I, I'm, I'm, I don't know. But my relationship with the COs that I knew, and indeed, a very important relationship I had with the district ranger, which I still am, I still have a relationship with him, with the district ranger, whose commitment to the forest service was very significant, a commitment of his life. I couldn't, I couldn't avoid having respect for what he was doing in the Columbia Gorge, and his commitment to making that available for generations to come. So these kinds of things had, it, it gave, gave me a feeling that there was something important we were doing OK. And I, I think, as contrasted with, with some of my friends who came out of the experience with a lot of bitterness, I didn't come out with that kind of feeling. I came out with a sense that a lot of mistakes were made, and good people made bad compromises, et cetera, but I saw more positive in the experience, for me, than negative. That doesn't mean that I would want to repeat it, or that I am recommending it to another generation of Selective Service generals, or anything of that sort.

00:38:20:00—00:40:22:00

Interviewer #2:

No, but I mean, you know, someone who's in the war, and horrible battles, the, the typical reaction of the veterans was to try and put that—

Interviewer #1:

[blows nose]

Interviewer #2:

—behind them, that's just over; I don't want to think about that, that's not me—

Charlie Davis:

Yeah.

Interviewer #2:

—I wanna, you know—whereas were you able to build on what you got during the war? Did that, did that help you move forward?

Charlie Davis:

Oh, I, I think so. My activity in, in, in pursuing the public interest, I have s-, had a role in public interest issues since the war. And I suspect I would not have been active in the American Civil Liberties Union had it, well, I'm sure I wouldn't have, in, had I pursued the course I was going, I suspect I would have been much more concentrated on making a living. I would not have gone to a cooperative community and tried to be part of an experiment in cooperative living. I would likely not have been involved in politics even a little bit, but I'm, that's, that's hard to say. But I, I think it m-, made me the kind of person that felt that raising children was a, an important part of what I did with my life, and avoiding entanglement with negative institutions, and sometimes that means that I've sort of been tilting at windmills. But being concerned about the output of a—

[distant discussion]

Charlie Davis:

—corporation when it's doing something to spoil the environment; being concerned about the output of a corporation when it's doing something to exploit low-cost labor in down-trodden parts of the world. Those are things that I think I'd brought out of that experience.

00:40:23:00—00:41:33:00

Interviewer #1:

Good. You know, we've been debating—

[clattering]

Interviewer #1:

—this a little bit—

Interviewer #2:

Yeah.

Interviewer #1:

—about the significance of the cooperative movement and the—

Interviewer #2:

[clears throat]

Interviewer #1:

—experimental living communities—

Charlie Davis:

Mm-hmm.

Interviewer #1:

—after the war. Is that, was that a big part of—

[clattering]

Interviewer #1

—did the COs have a big part in defining that after the war, and was the co-op movement a f-, significant thing in the United States, and during the Forties, and, and—

Camera Crew Member #2:

Uh-huh.

Interviewer #1:

—prior to the war, and afterward?

[production discussion]

Charlie Davis:

Are you thinking—now, there're two things—

Interviewer #1:

I, the consumer co-op—

Charlie Davis:

The consumer—

Interviewer #1:

—right—

Charlie Davis:

—cooperatives—

Interviewer #1:

—that, partic—

Charlie Davis:

Yeah.

Interviewer #1:

—and what else is there? There's housing cooperatives—

Charlie Davis:

Well—

Interviewer #1:

—and there's the whole—

Charlie Davis:

—well, keep in mind, the consumer cooperatives are a venture of providing goods and services [pause] operated by a democratic institution, in competition with private enterprise. The cooperative community movement was one in which various levels of sharing occurred.

[plane overhead]

Charlie Davis:

In some cases, of going back to—

Interviewer #2:

Let's stop for a—

Charlie Davis:

All right.

Interviewer #2:

—to—

Interviewer #1:

We've got a plane. It's not you.

Interviewer #2:

This is—

Charlie Davis:

Yeah.

Interviewer #1:

It, this is good, this is, we were—

Interviewer #2:

It's good as information, but—

Interviewer #1:

Yeah, yeah—

[cut]

00:41:34:00—00:42:59:00

Charlie Davis:

—cooperative community—

Camera Crew Member #1:

Say that—

Charlie Davis:

—was—

Camera Crew Member #1:

—again, please.

Charlie Davis:

The, a cooperative community was a enterprise in which the members of the community shared in its governance, but the consumers, who purchase its products, did not. The consumers who purchase it-, its pro-, products provided income to the folks who made various kinds of products, and the people in that group shared and shared alike. In some cases, going back 100 years, they shared al-, everything—that is, they shared the, individual houses; they shared in the work; they shared in the income that was derived. And in the case of the Macedonia Cooperative Community, where we worked for awhile, the community there served as a place where people could come and see how folks were trying to build a society based on love, and without conflict—with, with conflicts resolved, I should say, wi-, love and resolving conflicts. And, similar cooperative communities have developed in other places, as well. But that was what I was talking about.

00:43:00:00-00:43:47:00

Interviewer #1:

Yeah, but I—

Charlie Davis:

OK.

Interviewer #1:

—didn't realize you were there. Is that still in existence, the Macedonian community?

Charlie Davis:

No.

Interviewer #1:

No.

Charlie Davis:

The people who left Macedonia joined the Bruderhof, up in New York, and there are people there now. We were there, I had agreed to go down there to help with some organization matters—record keeping, that kind of thing—in 1947, and we kept $100 in cash, so that if my wife became pregnant, we would come back to the west coast, where, 'cause her parents live in Seattle. And we had to use that after about ten months, so you can see that the cooperation was pretty mutual. [laughs]

00:43:48:00—00:46:39:00

Interviewer #1:

The, tha-, I'd like to know more about that, but probably not—

Interviewer #2:

Not now.

Interviewer #1:

—in this, yeah. Could you tell us a little about Lew Ayr-, I, just to make—

Charlie Davis:

Oh, Lew Ayres.

Interviewer #1:

Yeah, go ahead, go ahead.

Charlie Davis:

Well, you can check the date that Lew came to camp. He was there, I think, about two months. Some of us heard about it on the radio. Of course, it was a big thing that Lew was

coming to Cascade Locks. And he arrived, and was regarded as a very interesting, decent kind of guy. He was a little older than most of us—like, maybe ten years older—but a very soft-spoken person, not someone to assert himself particularly. He did have one aspect of clothing that caused attention, that was, he liked to wear a scarf around his neck. And at one of our evening, Saturday evening soirees, where we were having some music and, and entertainment, a whole group of fellas walked in, wearing a scarf around the, their neck, and the punchline was that they were putting on Ayres. [laughs] But he made it clear from the beginning that he was there because he, this was the best he could do to act out his values. He would've preferred to be doing health services in the mi, someplace. He felt he was qualified to do first aid, and so on. And indeed, he, Lew did first aid at Cascade Locks. The moment that the national press got ahold of this business, that here's Dr. Kildare being shipped off to CO camp, when he would be prepared to accept a 1-A-O, if the military would, would assure him that he could do health services, medical service, rather than whatever they decided for him to do, such as driving a truck or carrying a litter, or doing clerical work. If, when they, military got working at that, they recognized that they needed to change the regulations so that one could apply and be s-, assured of doing first aid medical service if one were opposed to war and were willing to do that. So, Lew's experience was important in opening up opportunities for people who would, were willing to work as part of the military and were not concerned about that aspect of it, but who could not, prior to Lew Ayres getting any precedent set.

00:46:40:00—00:47:21:00

Interviewer #1:

Did others follow suit? Did others leave the, leave the camp, leave the camps because of that opportunity?

Charlie Davis:

Yes, yes. I don't know how many. I guess I would say that I know some specifically. I, I remember a fellow whose name I, I've forgotten right now who, who looked a lot like Lew. And sort-, shortly after Lew left, he said, Lew's position is just like mine, and he sent his draft board a letter, and he was—I guess his draft board. Hmm, I don't recall if he was—technically, I don't know whether he could have sent his draft board letter and changed things, or whether the letter would have gone to Selective Service headquarters and they would have changed it so he would have gone in the military.

00:47:22:00—00:48:05:00

Interviewer #2:

So, Charlie, before Dr. Kildare, of course, Lew's big hit, his big, what made him a star was _All Quiet on the Western Front_.

Charlie Davis:

Right.

Interviewer #2:

Was that a movie that, that you saw—

Interviewer #1:

[clears throat]

Interviewer #2:

—that affected you, that, do, do you remember being influenced by that, or...

Charlie Davis:

No. I think probably the m-, if I go back to a document, book, I would go back to a book by, I think, H.C. Peterson called _Propaganda for_, _for War_, which I read in 1939, '40, something like that, in which he recited the propaganda program in World War One. I don't recall any movies impacting me particularly.

00:48:06:00—00:48:59:00

Interviewer #2:

But, you know, the other thing that strikes me about Lew, and I don't know if it occurred to—

Charlie Davis:

Yeah.

Interviewer #2:

—you when you saw this guy who came in, who was a pretty big star—

Charlie Davis:

Yeah.

[dog barking]

Interviewer #2:

—what it had meant for him, in terms of the personal—

[dog barking]

Interviewer #2:

—commitment that—

Charlie Davis:

Oh, yeah.

Interviewer #2:

—basically, he was blowing off his career by—

Charlie Davis:

Right.

Interviewer #2:

—doing that, wasn't he?

Charlie Davis:

Right.

Interviewer #2:

How did folks in camp think about what he'd done on that level? I mean, did that, did you think about that?

Charlie Davis:

No, I don't think so.

Interviewer #2:

No.

Charlie Davis:

I don't think he was regarded as having taken any greater risk than anybody else, and I don't think he regarded himself as having done so.

Interviewer #1:

Mm-hmm.

Charlie Davis:

I didn't have one-on-one discussions with him that I recall.

[telephone rings]

Charlie Davis:

I recall some discussions in groups where people were talking about various kinds of things—

Interviewer #1:

Where's that coming from?

Interviewer #2:

That's, that's the fax phone.

Interviewer #1:

Oh.

Charlie Davis:

But—

Interviewer #2:

Sorry.

Camera Crew Member #1:

[unintelligible]

Interviewer #1:

Turn—

Interviewer #2:

No, this isn't important—

Interviewer #1:

—just wait for it—

Interviewer #2:

No, yeah, we don't need this. Let's just wait till it stops for a sec, it, it'll do one—

[cut]

00:49:00:00—00:50:51:00

Charlie Davis:

OK.

Camera Crew Member #1:

Go ahead.

Interviewer #1:

Tell us about it.

Charlie Davis:

Well, at camp, we ha-, of course, had a facility for first aid, place where people who were ill or injured could go for, as, as good a service as we could provide. And if they, if that service—say, for instance, a serious illness, of course, we'd have to take him—

Interviewer #2:

No, you have to—

Charlie Davis:

—to the hospital—

Interviewer #2:

—let's start over again.

Camera Crew Member #1:

[unintelligible]

Interviewer #2:

OK, hold on a sec. We need to start this over again. We had a camera—

Camera Crew Member #1:

My fault.

Interviewer #2:

—problem.

Interviewer #1:

OK.

Charlie Davis:

OK.

Interviewer #2:

Just go ahead. At camp we had a facility—

Charlie Davis:

Yeah.

Interviewer #2:

—and...

Charlie Davis:

OK. We had a fir-, first aid facility where people went who had colds that kept 'em off the working, off the work list, and injuries. If—and, and this was, this work was limited to first aid. Lew was, when, after he came to camp, he was on, he was on the work crew doing, I guess we call it, manicuring the mountains, for a f-, while. Then he became the first aid person. And obviously he was quite good at it. And my only experience with it was when I had a, a very bad cold and couldn't work. I was in there two or three days, and Lew looked after things quite well. I think everybody in camp that had that experience thought he did a, a fine job, and—he also exuded a kind of understanding, both of what was wrong with you, as well as an understanding of the relationship he had with cam-, with, with everybody else. That was reassuring. Fine person. Fine person.

00:50:52:00—00:51:17:00

Interviewer #1:

Did you have any thoughts about being treated by Dr. Kildare?

Charlie Davis:

No. [laughs] It, it really didn't occur to me at the time.

Interviewer #2:

Could, could you—I don't want to put words in your mouth—

Charlie Davis:

Yeah.

Interviewer #2:

—but could you say, it didn't occur to me at the time that I was being treated by Dr. Kildare?

Charlie Davis:

Oh, yeah. It didn't occur to me at the time that I was being treated by Dr. Kildare. I don't think it occurred to him either.

00:51:18:00—00:54:56:00

Interviewer #1:

How about—

Interviewer #2:

[unintelligible]

Interviewer #1:

—George Yamada? What was your expe-, your relationship with him, and what, what was his relationship with the camp; and, as we understand, that the camp organized to stop him from being sent to the internment camp. Do you remember that incident?

Charlie Davis:

Oh, yes. Well, George was drafted and came to camp the same time I did, December five, 1941. George was—

Interviewer #2:

[coughs]

Charlie Davis:

—my recollection, he was born in, in the, in Nebraska, came to California to go to school, and in May, in, in April, 1942, Colonel Kosch, who was the head at the, the director of the camp operations program of Selective Service, was at Cascade Locks, and my understanding is that he talked to George, and said, with the, recall that the evacuation orders began in early March, and in April, I think, Colonel Kosch talked to George and said he would have to be transferred someplace inland at some point. On the, at the end of June, the camp director, Mark Schrock—who was an employee of the, who was a member of the Church of the Brethren, and who had given a commitment for two years service at, at, at the camp as the director—received a wire from Selective Service, saying that you will release camper George... I think it's George K. Yamada, upon receipt from the Western Defense Command of transportation instructions to move this camper to a, to a War Relocation Authority camp. And Mark Schrock said he could not conscientiously do that. He would not be part of a, evacuation of persons of Japanese ancestry, or anybody else, based simply on race. And Mark sent that, the, the, the complicated relationship between the churches, the historic peace churches, the national organization of the historic peace churches, and the interface with Selective Service, was rather remarkable at the time. But Mark sent a letter, a t-, a cable, a wire, to each of these organizations, including to the director of Selective Service, saying, I will not do this. And at, on the occasion when he did this, he announced what he was doing to the camp at dinnertime, and, of course, our response was, we agree with you, and, this is outrageous, and besides that, we won't put up with it. So, we had a mimeograph machine, and we sent letters to all of the other CO camps at the time—I think there were about thirty-nine of them at the time. And in that we said that this was a, a racist—

[telephone rings]

Charlie Davis:

—event, and that we would ask for ourselves to have—

[telephone rings]

Charlie Davis:

—the same treatment that George would receive, and that we were considering—

[telephone rings]

Charlie Davis:

—nonviolent direct action.

Interviewer #2:

Let's stop.

Interviewer #1:

We've got a phone.

Charlie Davis:

OK.

Interviewer #1:

Where did that—

[cut]

00:54:57:00—01:01:17:00

Interviewer #1:

—there, yeah.

Charlie Davis:

Well—

Interviewer #2:

OK.

Charlie Davis:

—of course, this was, this was at the time that the challenges by Min Yasui, Gordon Hirabayashi, and Fred Korematsu were on the mind of the federal government, and on the twelfth of June, 1942, Yasui was tried in Portland. Now, we're talking about Yamada by the end of June, 1942, and Mark Schrock, the director of the camp, telling Selective Service, forget about it, we're not going to sign the documents you need to transfer this guy. And our camp, unaware of the trial in Portland of, of Min Yasui, sending telegra-, sending telegrams and letters to all the other CO camps, as well as to all the pacifist organizations we could think of, and copies to Selective Service. We, we had the feeling that, in order to be honest and forthright and pacifist in what we were doing, we need to tell Selective Service what we had in mind. Well, the director of Selective Service looked at the letter that said we were considering nonviolent direct action, and, whether it would take the form of a work stoppage,

whether it would take the form of a hunger strike, whether it would take the form of something else, we weren't sure, but we'd let you all know. And we got responses back from various camps that said, let us know what you're going to do, support assured, and so on. Well, the, I now think that, of course, Colonel Kosch, who was the head of the operations division, wanted to get on an airplane and fly out to Oregon and take over Cascade Locks. He also believed that this could not have happened without a conspiracy going on. Well, we were living in a, a, an isolated situation, we had no knowl—although Hood River, where Min Yasui was, and where the worst level of antagonism against Japanese-Americans, persons of Japanese ancestry, were, that was only fifteen miles from us. We had no a, awareness that that community was up in arms to get rid of, of persons of Japanese ancestry. And Colonel Kosch, of course, I believe had, was aware of what was going on in the, in the conflict generally. Well, the, the church administration, the guy who was head of the churches together, Paul French, talked to Colonel Benson, Bendetson, in the Western Defense Command, and persuaded him that George could be moved to a camp inland, and wouldn't have to go to a War Relocation Authority camp. Now, that was done between the thirtieth day of June and the seventh of July, 1942, and Geo-, George went to Colorado Springs at the end of July, 1942. But to the best of my knowledge, that was the only occasion anywhere in the country where non-Japanese opposed, by putting themselves directly at risk, with the US Army. Bendetson avoided the problem because George had indicated from the beginning that he would accept transfer inland, and the camp director indicated that he would sign documents to transfer George. A lot of philosophical things about Selective Service's right to transfer any of us at any time within the system. But the rigidity of the system, of the—not the Selective Service system I'm talking about now, but the rigidity of the War Relocation Authority in taking old men, little kids, old women, anybody who had an ounce of Japanese history, shipping 'em off to concentration camps, was, a, a, a, an error that pervaded the military, and what would have happened had Colonel Kosch come out and taken over the camp, I'm not yet prepared to say, because, you may recall that a judge by the name of James Alger Fee, in Portland, decided in 1944—no, 1945—that the whole CPS administration was phony, since the law said that the camps were to be r-, were to be run by civilians. And Judge Fee directed that some COs be, not be prosecuted when Selective Service transferred them from one camp to another, as contrasted with when their draft board sent them—

Interviewer #2:

Mm.

Charlie Davis:

—to a camp. That's a long, a long story, but I'm, I, I continue to be intrigued that possibly Judge Fee would have said—

Interviewer #2:

[clears throat]

Charlie Davis:

—if Colonel Kosch came out to run the camp at Cascade Locks, and litigation had occurred, it would've been in his district, and he might have said, look, this whole system is phony. Not only the, the CO camps being run by the military, but j-, Judge Fee was the only judge at the trial court level that said evacuation of persons of Japanese ancestry—I, I should say, of Japanese Americans, he didn't say it with respect to citize-, to non-citizens—evacuation of Japanese Americans is unconstitutional. He was the only judge that said that.

Interviewer #1:

Hmm.

Charlie Davis:

And whether he would have said that, with respect to George Yamada, that was the case, I think one has to say he would have, because Min Yasui was before him at the time that George, very close to the time that George Yamada would have been.

01:01:18:00—01:01:29:00

Interviewer #2:

Charlie—

Charlie Davis:

How long, long—yes?

Interviewer #2:

We've sort of lost something in the shuffle there.

Charlie Davis:

Yeah.

Interviewer #2:

Could you just give us a short statement that, what, I was really intrigued by what you said—

Interviewer #1:

Yeah.

Interviewer #2:

—that, that when, when Cascade—

Interviewer #1:

[blows nose]

Interviewer #2:

—Locks, when the conscientious obje—

[cut]

[end of tape]

01:01:30:00—01:02:10:00

Interviewer #2:

—you just start at, what we did at Cascade Locks—

Charlie Davis:

OK.

Interviewer #2:

—was the only time—

Camera Crew Member #1:

OK, ready.

Interviewer #2:

K, go ahead.

Charlie Davis:

What we did at Cascade Locks with our protest and our threat of nonviolence was unique. I'm not aware of anyplace else in the country where opposition to evacuation was mounted by persons, by Caucasians who insisted that it was wrong and succeeded in getting the policy changed, that George Yamada was not sent to a War Relocation Authority camp because we were going to protest. [pause] That it?

01:02:11:00—01:03:07:00

Interviewer #1:

Yeah?

Interviewer #2:

Yes. I am happy.

Interviewer #1:

I think that's—

Interviewer #2:

I'm very happy.

Interviewer #1:

OK. That's good, we didn't know that—

Interviewer #2:

George is happy, too.

Interviewer #1:

—we didn't understand that.

Camera Crew Member #1:

He said it looking at the camera, though.

Interviewer #1:

Can you tell me—

Interviewer #2:

Well—

Interviewer #1:

—also—

Interviewer #2:

—he did, he did say it looking at the camera. That's true. He was looking at the camera.

Interviewer #1:

Oh, OK.

Charlie Davis:

Oh.

Interviewer #2:

So—

Interviewer #1:

Should we do it—

Interviewer #2:

—I say we do it one more time—

Interviewer #1:

—let's do it one more time.

Charlie Davis:

OK.

Interviewer #2:

—looking at Judy.

Charlie Davis:

OK.

Interviewer #1:

It's really good. Look at me—

Interviewer #2:

Yes.

Interviewer #1:

—and do it again.

Charlie Davis:

All right.

Interviewer #2:

OK.

Charlie Davis:

To the best of my knowledge, the protest from Cascade Locks and the threat of nonviolent action is the only protest that was mounted by persons not of Japanese ancestry, and successfully prevented a person of Japanese ancestry from being put in a concentration camp. Of course, transfer to another CO camp may not be as, as different as one would like, but George did not go to a War Re-, Relocation Authority camp, and the decision not to send him was prompted by our protest.

01:03:08:00—01:03:39:00

Interviewer #1:

OK. Good. What can you tell us about Waldport? How ma—I don't know if that's—

Interviewer #2:

You weren't—

Interviewer #1:

—something you—

Interviewer #2:

—you didn't—

Interviewer #1:

—want to talk about—

Interviewer #2:

—I mean—

Charlie Davis:

OK, it's 141 miles from Portland.

Interviewer #2:

[laughs] No, but I mean—

Interviewer #1:

It is.

Interviewer #2:

—Waldport had a reputation for being a bunch of really strange people, and doing weird things, and Walter Winchell complained about it, and it, was, was it really a strange place, or what—I mean, you didn't live there, but you—

Charlie Davis:

No.

Interviewer #2:

—had to—

Charlie Davis:

Oh, I, I had lots of contacts in there, and—

Interviewer #2:

Yeah, just tell us about Waldport.

Charlie Davis:

—and lots of—

Interviewer #1:

Actually, I'm sorry to, back up a little bit and talk about it, 'cause Cascade Locks, a lot of arts thing went—

[cut]

01:03:40:00—01:05:15:00

Interviewer #1:

—and of Waldport might be—

Charlie Davis:

You want to know about the New Carissa?

Interviewer #1:

Sure.

Charlie Davis:

[laughs] It was, it last beached at Waldport, and was hauled out to sea and sunk. [laughs]

Interviewer #1:

Yeah, I know, I know. Just the other day, huh.

Interviewer #2:

Mm-hmm.

Interviewer #1:

Yeah, yeah, yeah. No, about the, but the arts—

Charlie Davis:

Yeah.

Interviewer #1:

—yeah.

Interviewer #2:

Yeah—

Charlie Davis:

Well—

Interviewer #2:

—yeah, COs are strange, artists are strange—

Charlie Davis:

—oh, well, there were artists at Cascade Locks—Kermit Sheets, Kemper Nomland, Glen Coffield, and others—who did good work. When you, when, when someone says there, they were strange people, I have a difficult time thinking of any, any of these folks as being strange in any way. There, they may have bec-, [laughs] they may have been strange when they got together at Waldport, but at Cascade Locks they weren't. And the nucleus for the camp at Waldport came from Cascade Locks. Ten or twelve guys went down there. And then when Everson arrived at Waldport, I think probably two years later, the, the national organization of churches had begun to recognize that we were never going to be able to have COs in overseas relief work, and they were trying to find things that would be attractive for people to spend another two or three, four years working together at, while they were doing forest service work. Well—

Interviewer #1:

[coughs]

Charlie Davis:

—the—

Interviewer #1:

Sorry. [coughs] I was looking for a break. [coughs] Go ahead.

01:05:16:00-01:

Charlie Davis:

The Waldport camp was authorized to specialize in art. The idea was to specialize in art as its way of education, that the administration—both the Selective Service committee and Brethren Service Committee—I think, began by thinking that, we ought to have an art instructor there—

[motorcycle passes]

Charlie Davis:

—or two, and we should have a program outlined. Well, Everson's idea was, get a bunch of artists together, and there will be art, inevitably. So, people who wanted to do this, wanted to be in an art community, signed up and—not all of them. Most of them were transferred to

Cascade Locks. Or, actually, I'm sorry, were, were transferred to Waldport. And they were very disciplined in their art. They may have been strange, in one way or another, in how they did their art, but they worked at it. They worked, of course, they worked on the project eight or nine hours a day, I think, most of the time for five, s-, five or six days a week. But at night they gathered together, probably drinking excessive amounts of coffee, to share their poetry, and to offer criticism of their poetry, to look at what they were doing in terms of, of drawing, and to listen to their music. And so, of course, some very important artists were there and came out of that experience. So, Waldport was unique in, in, in that way. The work program there was pretty dull: planting of trees, building of some roads, but—and it was about as much rain as at Cascade Locks, but it seemed like more, because they were right on the ocean, and it seemed like it rained all the time, to them. But the contribution of the artists to each other was independent of the work program, or the church, or whatever was going on. They were there, and they, they did their art. And then, of course, many of them came to San Francisco after that, and I think it's not an exaggeration to say that they were part of the nucleus of the Beat Generation. So, so, the, the, I have n-, I have no way of tallying how many of those artists went on to play, to be great artists in their own, without, without settling in San Francisco, but they went, there were artists who went to Seattle, and who went East to symphony orchestras and so on, of a high, very high quality folk.

Interviewer #2:

[coughs]

Charlie Davis:

Is that, that—

01:08:35:00—01:10:15:00

Interviewer #1:

Yeah, that was great, that was—

Interviewer #2:

Mm-hmm.

Interviewer #1:

—great. What, is there any, is there any, what's—

Interviewer #2:

[coughs]

Interviewer #1:

—your image of that? If you have one lasting image—

Interviewer #2:

Oh, did you know Everson? Everson?

Charlie Davis:

Ye-oh yeah.

Interviewer #2:

Could you talk a little about what—

Interviewer #1:

Yeah, yeah.

Interviewer #2:

—what he was like as a, as a person, or... I mean, he was this madman poet who was also a pretty good administrator, too, and so, he was a—

Charlie Davis:

Oh.

Interviewer #2:

—dedicated guy, wasn't he?

Charlie Davis:

Well, it's [laughs], I can't give you a word that makes much sense. If I just say he was intense, d-, does that fit? I, I think he was a very intense person. My s-, my feeling from the, the persons I knew around him was that he was a—his, his life was troubled, as well, as, when I was at the Locks. I mean, at Waldport. He had family needs that he was not nurturing. And, of course, he wasn't a, he wasn't an educated man, in terms of, of the college degrees, and so on. But he was an intense person, and I think everybody who came in contact with him knew that what he had in his mind was poetry, and what we are doing today, and what you're doing about art, and where we were going tomorrow, with this, wh-, it had to do with art. Work program or what's cooking on the, in the kitchen, what time it is for dinner. I don't think those were issues that you would get much out of Everson with. Marvelous experience for people b-, who were around him, even though obviously he was a complex person, as were most of the people there.

01:10:16:00—01:12:33:00

Interviewer #1:

Is there anything that is, what's the, of lasting, what do you think of when you think of Waldport? What's the image of what was produced there that, that sticks with you?

Charlie Davis:

[clears throat] [pause] Well, it's, it's hard for me to pick out one thing, but the publications that came out of Waldport, and the intensity of drive that got that done. You, you know, if you're doing creative work only a, a few hours a day, it takes a lot of effort and, and discipline, and that wa-, that was, that, that was there. The, the publications, I think of the, the Illit-, _Illiterati_, the Untide Press, that [laughs] this, this sort of thing is all being—some of Glen Coffield's stuff that came out there. These were all kinds of recollections. I remember, of course, since I was mostly involved in the administrative side of camp, I think of some of our great achievements, like buying enough salmon at a cheap price to ship down to Waldport as well as to Cascade Locks. And then, of course, there were other places that artists were, and did great work. But the lasting memory of Waldport is rain, rain, rain, cloudy skies, and guys in the dormitory, or in the, a, a work station someplace, talking about their work. I think you, I think you may have seen a photograph of several of these guys mocking up a, a printing press. And those—I hate to, I don't want to be authoritative about what the weather was like, but I think the weather was much more, much more attractive at Cascade Locks than at Waldport. At least, the gray days coming in day after day I think of as being pretty demoralizing.

01:12:34:00—01:13:22:00

Interviewer #1:

Mm-hmm. But did they find some joy in the art they were doing that made up for—

Charlie Davis:

Oh—

Interviewer #1:

—that? They were—

Charlie Davis:

—oh, ye-, well, I think [laughs], I think I may have thought they were gray days. I don't think they knew. [laughs]

Interviewer #1:

[laughs]

Charlie Davis:

For the mo-, well, I doubt, I think probably some of Everson's writings have indicated that there were—

[distant siren]

Charlie Davis:

—morose times there, but part of that was related to his inability to communicate with his wife and with others outside of camp. And, of course, his writings also indicate that there were some screwballs at, at, in the art group.

[distant siren]

Charlie Davis:

[coughs] And, I think, also indications there are some people who didn't work very hard. And I'm saying they all worked hard, but I th-, that seemed to me to be the case.

01:13:23:00—01:13:57:00

Interviewer #1:

What, what writings are you thinking of that, what are the writings that, that stand out for you from that period?

Interviewer #2

[clears throat]

Charlie Davis:

Well, the, Glen Coffield's, _The Horned Owl_; the, the poems in the Illiterati; the, the art in _The Illiterati_, much of it by Kemper Nomland; those things were all interesting. The first issue of _The Illiterati_ was—

[cut]

01:13:58:00—01:15:01:00

Charlie Davis:

—first issue of The Illitera-, Illitera-, -erati—

Interviewer #2:

Start over again.

Charlie Davis:

OK.

Interviewer #1:

Start over, yeah.

Charlie Davis:

The first issue of the little magazine, _The Illiterati_, was censored by the postmistress at the post office in Cascade Locks, because it had a s-, what you'd call a stick drawing, a one-line drawing of a nude woman. And so she confiscated—most of the cop-, all of the copies had been sent for mailing. She had no comment at all about the fact that there was within that, on another page, a nude man. And [laughs] how she missed that, I don't know. But that was her reason for confiscating it. The, some of us who have copies of that treasure that first copy, but it is humorous that the postal system was so aggressive at that point.

01:15:02:00—01:17:57:00

Interviewer #2:

Charlie, the other literary thing that, creative thing, that comes to mind, well, maybe, let me tell you the name, and tell me what comes to mind. The CPS Mikado.

Charlie Davis:

Oh. Well, that was, that was done at Cascade Locks.

Interviewer #2:

I know, I know.

Charlie Davis:

Oh, yes, oh—

Interviewer #2:

Talk to me about _The Mikado_. What—

Charlie Davis:

Oh.

Interviewer #2:

—what was that like?

Interviewer #1:

[unintelligible]

Charlie Davis:

Oh, _The Mikado_ in CPS was superb. It was a, a play in the fashion of Gilbert and Sullivan, composed, I believe, mostly by Kermit Sheets, in which all of the actors were part of the camp experience. The, the pl-, parts were played by guys around camp. All—in fact, the, the ladies of the chorus were played by guys, [laughs] who, as I see them now, were not, would not quite qualify. Their, I think their legs are just as bony as they were then, but they wear, wore little skirts and so on, and it was a great success. The, _The Mikado_ and [pause] the, the, the, the daughter were all big roles, and the acting assistant director was [stutters] in, in the play as part of the great excitement—and, of course, there were lots of places were there were jabs at the kind of situation we were in. You, I was talking with a group in Portland about the experience a while back, and commented that when a reporter from _The Oregonian_ visited Cascade Locks in early '42, he wrote a story, and said one of the things that was different about Cascade Locks than a military place he would go to, is that there were no pin-ups. Well [clears throat] it has to be recognized that there, I had, I didn't know that. I didn't have any idea that we didn't have any pin-ups, but we didn't. But _The Mikado_ had a great piece in it, called "Women, and Women, and Women," you know, the, the little—what is it? What the little bird, the tweety bird sings. "A tit, willow tit, willow tit, willow—" [laughs], it was, "and women, and women, and women." And that refrain went through about what happened to us as a result of not having any women around. So, it wasn't that we were somehow deprived of our understanding of sex, but we just apparently didn't have much interest in Betty Grable. [laughs]

01:17:58:00—01:18:19:00

Interviewer #1:

[laughs] Can you sing any of the songs from _The Mikado_? Do you remember that song—

Charlie Davis:

[coughs]

Interviewer #1:

—a little more of it?

Charlie Davis:

[pause] No.

Interviewer #1:

[laughs]

Interviewer #2:

OK. Let, let's stop for a minute.

Interviewer #1:

[laughs]

Charlie Davis:

Well—

Interviewer #2:

—let's stop for a minute.

Interviewer #1:

I think Bill's here.

Interviewer #2:

We're about done, I think we're about done. I just—

Interviewer #1:

Yep.

Interviewer #2:

—have one final—

[a newcomer enters room]

Newcomer:

Hi.

Interviewer #2:

[to newcomer] Hi, hello, welcome!

Newcomer:

We have—

Interviewer #1:

Hi—

Newcomer:

—arrived.

Interviewer #2:

Welcome!

Interviewer #1:

—hi, how you doing?

Charlie Davis:

If I—

[cut]

01:18:20:00—01:18:24:00

Charlie Davis:

—my children and grandchild-, -children have enjoyed _The Mika—"

[cut]

01:18:25:00—01:18:47:00

Charlie Davis:

—was hoping to use the Gilbert and Sullivan style to write something on the Monica Lewinsky, Bill Clinton event.

Interviewer #1:

Oh, that's a good idea.

Interviewer #2:

That would be cute.

Interviewer #1:

Well, you know, they also, they did an _HMS Pinafore_ at Asheville Prison—

Charlie Davis:

Oh, yeah—

Interviewer #1:

—as well.

Charlie Davis:

—oh, did they?

Interviewer #1:

Yeah.

Charlie Davis:

Yeah.

Interviewer #1:

Larry Garrow and Charlie—

Charlie Davis:

Yeah—

Interviewer #1:

—Butcher—

Charlie Davis:

—yeah.

Interviewer #1:

—and some of the, so it was, it sort of a was a popular—

Interviewer #2:

So—

Interviewer #1:

—theme—

Charlie Davis:

Yeah.

Interviewer #1:

—at the time.

Charlie Davis:

Well, it's, always is.

Interviewer #1:

Yeah. [laughs]

01:18:48:00—01:20:52:00

Interviewer #2:

Charlie, I think we're almost done, but—

Charlie Davis:

OK.

Interviewer #2:

—you know, the working title for our, for our film is _The Good War and Those who Refused to Fight It_. What does the term, the good war, mean to you?

[children making noise]

Charlie Davis:

[pause] I don't, I'm unable to look at the things that occurred in World War Two as good without recognizing the horrors of Hiroshima; the horrors of the ro-, what, what was done by the United States and the Allies, as well as the horrors of what happened in the Holocaust, and what happened in London. I think it, to, to use the word, good, it, it's, it's anathema to me. I, I can recognize it was a tragedy, and that it was the product of some bad things that occurred prior. And I see World War Two as a outgrowth of World War I, with hardly an interruption, so that if World War Two was a good war, then it was a product of World War One. But the word, good, I have hard time, oh, adjusting to. I guess it's good only in that the, the word is—I know Studs Terkel used that phrase before Vietnam, didn't he?

Interviewer #2:

Mm.

Charlie Davis:

After Vietnam, I guess Vietnam established the standard for bad wars. But I think, aside from the goods things of people feeling good about being part of an important endeavor, a national endeavor, I don't find much good in it.

01:20:53:00—01:23:25:00

Interviewer #2:

So, [pause] the, the fact that the war ended the way it did must've really given you conflicting feelings. I mean, I'm sure you were glad the war was over, but the way it ended...

Charlie Davis:

Well, yes. And of course, I felt that it, the war could have ended much, much sooner, and it's quite clearly documented that the war could have ended, given all the conflicts and all of the various parties, that had we not been engulfed with an in-, irrational mentality, internationally at that point, where punishing innocent people was a priority, the war could've ended much, much sooner. Japan, of course—

[children making noise]

Charlie Davis:

—the decisions of President Truman, which are understandable, were wrong decisions, and the chaos that resulted from, and produced another, what, forty years of, of war with the Soviet Union grew out of that, that whole pattern. And certainly when the bomb was dropped, I got no joy from it. I, I, I think most folks who thought about, about it at the time realized that, beginning about mid-1942, with respect to the US and Japan, that that contest was, could have been negotiated to an end. I, I didn't at the time know about what was going on with respect to Jews in, in Germany, and from what I do, knew about it now, I just don't know how that could have been brought to a, a, an end without—

[children making noise]

Charlie Davis:

—[pause] without the war. But I see the, all of that as a product of what began in 1917. And I suppose the willingness of people to destroy each other on the, from the motivation of something I suppose you might call tribal, or, or national ethos, is just with us still. [pause] I've been long.

01:23:26:00-01:23:30:00

Interviewer #1:

It was good, though.

Interviewer #2:

Yeah, that was great.

Interviewer #1:

That was very good.

Interviewer #2:

Thank—

[cut]

[end of interview]

01:23:30:00