

# Cactus Country Crier

NACCCA Chapter 44 /Summer, 2007 Edition

## ***Oh to be in Phoenix, now that summer is here.....sheeeesh!***

This issue of the Crier is running a bit late. We've been busy moving our daughter and granddaughter from Camp Pendleton back to Phoenix to stay with us while our son-in-law serves in Iraq. Meanwhile, a lot of my CCC projects have fallen by the way lately.

In this issue you'll find a story about "Red" Erwin who served in the CCC in Alabama and went on to earn the Medal of Honor in the Pacific Theater. We'll probably never know for certain how Red's CCC experience impacted his later life or if it was even partly responsible for his singular act of heroism, but we all know that the CCC played a meaningful part in millions of men's lives, and while they didn't all go on to earn the Medal of Honor, they did work together to form the backbone of what is now known as "The Greatest Generation."

Enjoy your summer and I look forward to seeing you back at our monthly meetings in September. In the meantime, be thinking of ways you can help get the word out about CCC history and about the CCC alumni. Be thinking of ways we can raise money for our CCC statue. We can't all make a difference in the way Red Erwin made a difference but we can make a difference in our own small way.

**Michael I. Smith, President Chapter 44**

## **They look like pins but they're selling like hotcakes!**

It's a pleasure to be able to report that to date we've raised about \$370 from the sale of the CCC Statue Donor lapel pins. Perhaps in an upcoming issue we'll run a list of those who've already been "pinned," but for now, we'll simply ask the rest of you, "what's the hold up?"

These pins are flashy little numbers that will set you apart at our monthly meetings, though we can't promise that by wearing one you'll become more charming or better looking. What you will do by purchasing a pin for \$10 is help us get one step closer to realizing our goal of having a CCC worker statue for Arizona.

## **Bill who?**

I received an email from the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation, stating that they'd received my request for assistance but that our project doesn't fit "the foundation's current giving priorities." It seems they're focusing much of their effort on overseas health initiatives. I'm happy that they've chosen to do that, but I wonder if it will make the rest of the world dislike the United States any less. Besides, I have to admit that I don't even remember asking them for help with our statue project, but I'm impressed that they at least bothered to reply – some of our elected officials haven't even answered my letters.

## **NACCCA Chapter 44, Phoenix, Arizona**

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### **Meeting Schedule**

**May 19, 2007 September 15, 2007**

**June 16, 2007 October 20, 2007**

**July NO MEETING November 17, 2007**

**August NO MEETING December 15, 2007**



## **+Chapter Eternal +**

We received word that Bob Williams passed away on August 2nd. Bob was a frequent attendee at our monthly Chapter meetings and we'll miss having him to join us. As the Chapter Eternal column becomes a more regular fixture in both our newsletter and the National Journal, we should be reminded how important it is that you all record your CCC experiences so that researchers in the future won't have to rely on hearsay and theory when they study the CCC.

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"Success is seldom recognized because it is dressed in coveralls and looks like hard work."



## **“Red” Erwin: CCC Enrollee, Medal of Honor Recipient**

Hard times made man out of Henry Eugene Erwin at an early age. Born in Docena, Alabama in 1921, his father died when Henry was just 10 years old. As the oldest of several children, he took a job. Gene, as his family called him, dropped out of high school to join the Civilian Conservation Corps where he was put in charge of crews planting kudzu in northern Alabama.

After the CCC, Gene worked in a steel mill before joining the Army in January 1943. Worried the war would pass him by, he passed up a chance to attend Yale. Gene trained on B-17s, then transferred to B-29s where he served as a radio operator. In early 1945 he was shipped to Guam for assignment to the 52<sup>nd</sup> Bomb Squadron and joined the crew of a B-29 named “City of Los Angeles,” where he promptly picked up the nickname “Red” because of his red hair.

On Erwin’s 18<sup>th</sup> mission, the squadron was assigned to bomb the Japanese chemical plant at Koriyama, north of Tokyo; the City of Los Angeles was tasked to be the lead bomber. At the rendezvous point, it was Erwin’s job to jettison phosphorous smoke bombs through a tube in the fuselage of the B-29 as the signal for the other planes to form up.

For reason’s unknown, a smoke bomb malfunctioned and exploded in the tube then shot back into the plane striking Erwin in the face. Thick white smoke immediately filled the front of the plane and 1,300 degree phosphorous began to burn Erwin, blinding him, burning off his hair, most of his right ear, part of his nose and large patches of skin.

In addition to Erwin’s wounds, the plane and crew were in mortal danger. Flaming phosphorous was burning through the metal bulkhead. It was now just a question of whether the blinded flight crew would crash into the ocean before the fire reached the bomb bay causing the entire plane to explode in midair.

With tremendous presence of mind, Erwin snatched up the flaming canister and began to work his way

forward, pausing painfully to unhook the latch on the navigator’s table, holding the burning bomb between his bare arm and his ribcage to do so. In the process, the white hot “phosphorous burned through his flesh to the bone” according to an Air Force report.

Meanwhile, the pilot and co-pilot were completely blinded by smoke as Erwin inched closer and closer to their position. Once past the navigator’s table, Erwin worked his way forward and threw the phosphorous bomb out the co-pilot’s window.

As the smoke cleared Erwin’s crewmates began to realize what had happened and what Erwin had done. When they saw him, they were horrified. “Are you alright?” one asked. “I’m fine,” Irwin replied. Another crewman had turned a fire extinguisher on Erwin and put out the fire, but the phosphorous continued to burn on and under the skin.

The pilot jettisoned the bomb load and turned for Iwo Jima for an emergency landing as the crew worked to comfort and stabilize Irwin who they knew was dying before their eyes. Irwin never lost consciousness and, as the designated first aid man on the crew, warned them not to administer too much morphine. He even asked, “Is everybody else all right?”

Major General Curtis LeMay, commander of the XXI Bomber Command ordered that the award paperwork for the Medal of Honor be expedited so that the presentation could be made while Irwin was still alive; approval reportedly coming from Washington in record time. There was no Medal of Honor available in the theater, and according to one report, one of Erwin’s squadron mates “appropriated” a Medal of Honor from a display case in Pearl Harbor.

Red Erwin was awarded the Medal of Honor by General LeMay on April 19, 1945 on the Island of Guam. Thirty days after his harrowing mission on the City of Los Angeles, Erwin arrived in Sacramento to continue his miraculous recovery. “I got down to 87 pounds, skin and bones...I didn’t give up.” Erwin told a reporter years later.

Discharged in 1947, Red Erwin underwent 41 surgeries to restore his eye site and the use of one arm. He worked for the Veterans Administration for 37 years, retired with 43.5 years of federal service and received an “outstanding” performance rating every single year. He and his wife raised a son and 3 daughters. Henry Eugene Erwin passed away on January 16, 2002.

## May Meeting Notes

By my count we had about 12 people in attendance for the meeting. Faye Weber brought her neighbor Tony as a guest. Minutes of the March meeting were read and we discussed the plaque dedication at Chiricahua National Monument, which took the place of our April meeting. Other hot topics of discussion included a promising offer of assistance with our statue fund, the new lapel pin fundraiser and our plan to sponsor a CCC writing competition for grade school and high school students. The meeting adjourned with a moment of silence in honor of Armed Forces Day.

## June Meeting Notes

Again, I counted about 12 in attendance for what was our final meeting before the summer break. Special visitors in attendance included Mr. Paul Grainger who served as treasurer of Chapter 149 in Tucson. Paul is now living in Mesa and we sure hope he'll join us for Chapter 44 meetings in the future. Paul gave us some background on his time in the CCC in the Missoula District where he served in a number of capacities including mess sergeant and assistant to the District inspector. Also in attendance was Bryan Lausten and his wife. Bryan is the archeologist/historian for the Bureau of Reclamation office in Phoenix and he is working to catalog and preserve CCC-built structures in the SRP irrigation system. The major focus currently is on moving a box structure out of the alignment of the new light rail system on Central Avenue. The major topic of discussion was the CCC writing competition, which was voted on and approved. (See separate article.) After a full discussion with lots of good input our writing competition is ready to launch for next year's school session. Those assembled parted company satisfied that we'd made good use of the afternoon and ready to face the hot summer months.



## CCC Writing Competition

The CCC writing competition was approved at the June meeting of Chapter 44. In a nutshell, the competition will be open to two categories: 6<sup>th</sup>, 7<sup>th</sup>, and 8<sup>th</sup> graders in the lower division and 9<sup>th</sup>, 10<sup>th</sup>, 11<sup>th</sup>, and 12<sup>th</sup> graders in the upper division. Announced prize money will be \$50 for the lower division and \$75 for the upper division. We will work to have additional prizes both for the grand prize winners as well as some runner up winners. We'll also see about buying some ribbons to send to all the students who submit an article to acknowledge their hard work and to show our appreciation for their interest in the CCC.

Now the job begins: getting the word out. We'll begin by sending a letter and contest information to the State Superintendent of Public Instruction, Tom Horne. We've also had recent contact with local school teachers who've expressed an interest in the competition so we'll also send information to them. Among the other decisions made at the meeting was the decision to provide a general source list that potential contest entrants can use as a starting point for their research. A CCC resource page has also been set up on the internet. Six members volunteered to be judges:

Jack Duncan      Archie Fraijo      Lou Linxwiler  
Bill Millard      Jeannette Millard      Faye Weber

Bryan Lausten, archeologist for the Bureau of Reclamation in Phoenix has volunteered to serve as a "guest judge" and we'll see if we can round up one more outside judge to serve in the same capacity. Faye Weber has kindly volunteered to look for donated prizes like gift cards from local merchants. You can help us out by donating money to the prize fund or by researching other possible sources for donated prizes.

## Check Out the Forest Army Blog

If you're skunked for something to do during the hot summer months, log onto the internet and visit the new CCC web log at:

<http://forestarmy.blogspot.com/>

I've tried to fill the blog with interesting CCC history and once we resume our meetings, I'll include Chapter 44 information. I'm also thinking about setting up a separate blog for our writing competition so students can log on for guidance and CCC resource information. Check it out and post a reply to one of the articles so I'll know you visited!

## Notes of Regional Interest

Word was received from Robert Griffiths, a founding member of NACCCA, that the directors of the Fresno and San Diego City Corps are interested in having a CCC statue placed at a new CCC museum that is planned for Fresno. Griff is hoping to meet with the newly appointed head of the California Conservation Corps once he gets settled in to his new job.

Additionally, the state Director of Forestry expressed an interest in the statue campaign but nothing has come of it so far. A deputy parks director has flatly rejected the idea of a statue but Griff intends to work his proposal from another angle, hopefully through the governor's office directly. Finally, the assistants to Griff's state senator and assemblyman have pledged to promote CCC statues as much as possible

### **\* REMEMBER! \***

**Summer break is nearly over! We expect everyone to come back in September with some good fishing stories! (See the 2007 schedule elsewhere in this edition.)**

## **Notes of National Interest**

Time is fast approaching for the NACCCA reunion in Kentucky. The deadline for registration is September 1<sup>st</sup>. There will be much discussion regarding the merger with the Camp Roosevelt Legacy Foundation and planning for 75<sup>th</sup> anniversary observances around the country. Plan to attend if you are able!

## **New for the Bookshelf....**

### **The Civilian Conservation Corps In Nevada:**

**From Boys to Men**, by Renee Corona Kolvet and Victoria Ford was published by the Univ. of Nevada Press in 2006 and it's a worthwhile statewide history of the CCC that will appeal to anyone interested in the CCC. Anyone who's researched just a single CCC camp knows what a daunting job that can be; imagine researching CCC work across an entire state! Using a range of source material the authors detail CCC work under every technical service operating in Nevada from 1933 to 1942. Of particular interest is the book's camp listing, which lists Nevada's CCC camps in groups by designation: Division of Grazing (DG), Bureau of Reclamation (BR), Biological Survey/Fish & Wildlife Service (BF/FWS), National and State Park NP/SP, Navy (M), Forest Service (F) and Soil Conservation Service (SCS or PE or P for camps on private lands or for work done for a private entity). Even if you don't purchase a copy for your

CCC collection, you should find this book in the library and if your local library doesn't have a copy, tell them to get on the ball!

## **State Statue Status**

We're hovering at a bit over \$6,000 in our statue fund. Recent rumblings from headquarters hint at the possibility of outside grant money being offered for states that do not yet have a statue. This is good news but our excitement should be tempered by the realization that other states are vying for the same money. We have already sent in word that we wish to be included in the running for one of the grants, but we've gotten no definite word on when or even how the money will be awarded. We're in a wait and see pattern. Grand Canyon is exploring the idea of having a donation box placed in the visitor center during the CCC anniversary, which should be a big help. We have also had a generous proposal from a Chapter 44 member in southern Arizona, which we are attempting to put together at the moment. In the meantime, we should just work as hard as we can toward what seems like an unattainable goal but not let it distract us so much that we forget to work on the little projects that do so much to keep the CCC and its legacy at the forefront of people's minds.

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### **Heard from.....**

I had a nice telephone conversation with John Irish, who is now living in Colorful Colorado. John has been busy with the kinds of things that come up when you move from one state to another but hearing from him lets us know that he hasn't forgotten about us, or the NACCCA Chapter he helped establish. We discussed our hopes and visions of where we would like the new CCC Legacy organization go in the future, including better internet access for researchers and students. One way to accomplish this would be to make sure that the photo collection is scanned and made available via the internet. I briefed John on some of the 75<sup>th</sup> anniversary projects that are currently in the works and promised to keep him in the loop regarding our activities.



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### **Chapter 44 Past Presidents**

John Irish, 1981-1986

Halbert Burch, 1986-1987

Jerry Ingram, 1987-1989

Frank Arcineaga, 1990

Arley Ross, 1991

Mackie Clark, 1992

Lew Erdos, 1993

Owen Carolan, 1994-1999

Archie Fraijo, 2000-2002

Michael Smith, 2003 – Present

**Visit these web pages:**

CCC Blog:

<http://forestarmy.blogspot.com/>

CCC Resource Page:

<http://cccreources.blogspot.com/>