



VETERAN COMPANY 2420 (CAMP P-60) AT THE FAIRFIELD FIRE TOWER IN WASHINGTON COUNTY, 1934 (ALABAMA FORESTRY COMMISSION)

## Protecting Alabama's Forests

### The Civilian Conservation Corps Projects in State and Private Forests 1933 – 1942

By Robert G. Pasquill Jr., Forest Archeologist and Historian,  
*National Forests in Alabama*

On March 21, 1933, President Franklin D. Roosevelt addressed Congress and laid out his plans for dealing with unemployment. The president proposed “to create a civilian conservation corps to be used in simple work, not interfering with normal employment, and confining itself to forestry, the prevention of soil erosion, flood control and similar projects.” On March 31, Congress passed the Emergency Conservation Act, creating what was popularly called “the Civilian Conservation Corps,” or simply, the CCC.

The CCC would serve primarily as a labor force for the agencies of the Departments of Interior and Agriculture, and unlike many of the other New Deal programs, funding for CCC projects did not have to be matched by the states. It also provided a labor source for state forestry commissions. Between the proposal on March 21 and the passage of the Act on March 31, the CCC was debated and refined in Washington with two amendments being added to the original language of the bill. The first amendment, proposed by Major R.Y. Stuart, chief of the Forest Service, asked that the bill be amended to allow work on private land. He realized that the majority of public land was in the West and the majority of population in the East. The second amendment was proposed by Oscar De Priest, Illinois (R), the only African-American member of Congress, who proposed that the selection of enrollees be made with no discrimination based on race, color, or creed. (Lacy 1976:29)

Alabama wasted no time. *The Montgomery Advertiser* reported on April 2, 1933, that State Forester Colonel Page S. Bunker had submitted his reforestation plans to Washington. Projects in Alabama could employ an estimated 20,000 men working in the

seven state parks and thirteen state forests. Although the State Commission of Forestry had been established in 1907, very little work had been accomplished due to a lack of funding. It was revitalized in 1923 however, by the provision of legislative funding and the appointment of Colonel Bunker as the state forester. (Burleson 1975:29)

*The Montgomery Advertiser* reported on April 10 that Alabama had a quota of 5,000 “junior” enrollees. These young men between the ages of 18 and 25 were required to come from families on relief. They had to be citizens of the United States, and had to agree to send a substantial portion of their \$30 monthly allotment back to their families. Although selection was to be made without discrimination, the camps were, for the most part, segregated by color, as they were run by the segregated United States Army. On May 11, 1933, President Roosevelt authorized the inclusion of war veterans into the CCC. (Watkins 1999:162)

The first CCC camps established in Alabama were located in the Alabama National Forest in Lawrence and Winston counties in May of 1933. By the end of June, Colonel Bunker’s office was receiving hundreds of letters each day related to President Roosevelt’s reforestation program. According to an article in the June 22, 1933, edition of *The Florida News*,

most of the letters regarded employment, but many were requests for projects in various parts of the state.

## State Forestry Projects

In June 1933, four CCC camps were established for state forestry projects in Alabama. Camp S-56 was established at Townley on June 2 by Company 467. Their work project consisted of building roads and firebreaks over the mountains and fighting forest fires. Company 467 was transferred to Sumter County in May 1934.

Camp S-51 was established at Oxford by Company 468 on June 3. This project consisted primarily of building a road to the top of Cheaha Mountain. In April 1934, the assignment was converted to a state park project.

Camp S-52 was established at Chunchula on June 14 by Company 1485. Their project consisted of construction of truck trails and firebreaks, forest fire suppression and prevention, and fire hazard reduction work. Company 1485 was transferred to Uriah in March 1939.

Camp S-53 was established at Florala on June 15 by Company 1483. They constructed firebreaks, roads, and bridges over 90,000 acres of private land. In November 1934, Company 1483 was transferred to Meridian, Mississippi.

## Private Forestry Projects

By the end of June 1933, eight CCC camps were established for private forestry projects. On June 28, 1933, Company 2403 established Camp P-54 at Brewton. They constructed firebreaks, fire observation towers, telephone lines, and truck roads. Camp P-54 was abandoned in July 1934. Camp P-55 was established at Vredenburgh on June 25 by Company 479. They were transferred to Newton, Mississippi, in December 1934.

Company 1432 established Camp P-58 at Clayton on June 23. This was a company of African-American enrollees. They conducted their forestry project on land owned by A.B. Robertson. Most of the work consisted of soil erosion control, and in April 1935, the Soil Conservation Service took over the supervision of the project. In

January 1936, Company 1432 was transferred to Camp SP-3 at Uriah to work on the development of Little River State Park.

On June 22, 1933, Company 465 established Camp P-59 at Northport. After finishing construction of their camp, the work of this African-American company consisted primarily of fighting forest fires and road construction in Tuscaloosa County. They also established a side-camp of about 60 enrollees at Moundville, where they did erosion control and reconstructed several of the earthen mounds in the park. When word was received that the Company was to be transferred, civic organizations in Tuscaloosa County protested. In 19½ months, Company 465 had

built over 40 miles of road and carried out a great deal of fire prevention work in Tuscaloosa County. In spite of the protests, the Company was transferred to Camp SP-7 in November 1934 to work on Cheaha State Park. Company 465 maintained the side-camp at Moundville after they were transferred.

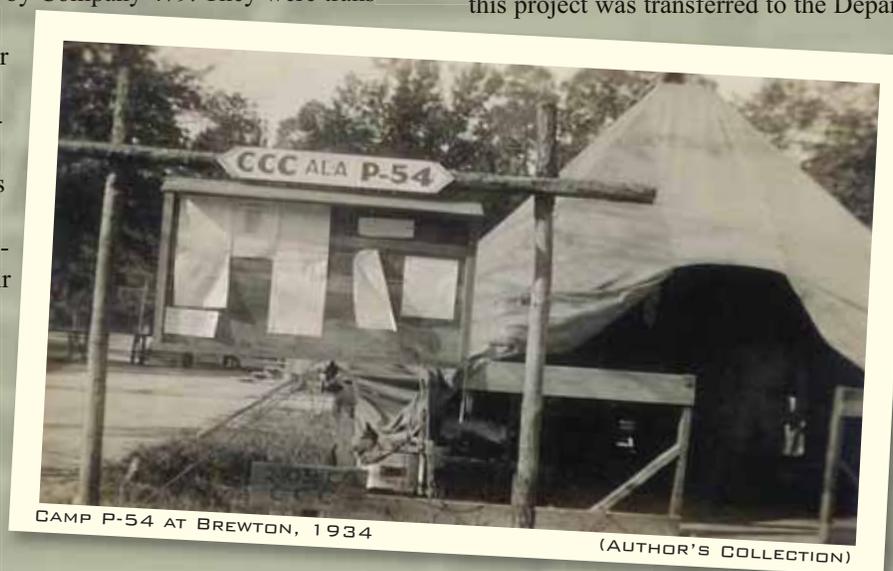
Camp P-61 was established on June 25, 1933, by Company 484 at Bay Minette. As soon as they completed the camp, their work project began across Baldwin County. John H. Guinn arrived at camp during the summer of 1933, spending two weeks in camp “conditioning” (getting into physical shape) before joining the work crews, building access roads for fire trucks. He worked with the civil engineer, laying out the roads, and was soon promoted to assistant leader earning \$36 each month. During fire season, he patrolled all of Baldwin County. He also manned the fire towers, most of them 70-foot wooden towers, but there were also taller steel towers. (Mr. John H. Guinn interview, November 18, 2002)

On October 24, 1934, *The Onlooker*, a weekly newspaper of Baldwin County, reported that there were 45 observation towers on state and privately owned land in Alabama. The state owned 13 steel towers, three towers of pole construction, and one stone tower. Private landowners, in cooperation with the State Commission of Forestry and federal agencies, had built five steel towers, 12 towers of sawed timber, and 11 towers of pole construction. Baldwin County had 15 towers, with several more being considered.

On June 24, 1933, Company 487 established Camp P-62 at Bessemer and began work on a private forestry project. In December 1933, the project was changed to Camp S-62 and they continued to operate as a State Forestry project. In October 1934, this project was transferred to the Department of Interior and

work shifted to the development of Oak Mountain State Park. (1936 CCC District D Annual)

On June 29, 1933, Camp P-63 was established by Company 1415. This African-American company was originally assigned to Chatom, but after protests by local citizens, the camp was established at Jackson where they were welcomed. Company 1415 worked on a private for-



estry project in Clarke County until they were transferred to Morton, Mississippi, in November 1934.

Camp P-73 was established at York on June 2, 1933, by Company 467. The work project consisted of fire prevention on 400,000 acres of privately owned land in Choctaw and Sumter counties, including the Allison Lumber Company. According to an article that appeared in the December 12, 1935, edition of the *Tuscaloosa News*, Colonel E. F. Allison was considered the South's foremost conservationist. By 1936, Company 467 had constructed 40 miles of truck trails, 40 creosote-piling bridges,

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CAMP P-54 AT BREWTON, 1934

(AUTHOR'S COLLECTION)

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and a steel fire tower. They had run 25 miles of telephone line between fire towers, and had worked nearly 7,000 man-days at the Alabama State Forestry Nursery. In 1937, they built a 120-foot steel fire tower, created a six-acre lake to irrigate the state nursery, and produced and packed 2.5 million seedlings at the nursery. Company 467 also mapped 288,404 acres of land, showing timber quality, as well as houses, fences, roads, churches, and streams. They collected 18 bushels of conifer and one ton of hardwood seeds. Their fire control work increased the awareness of the people in that part of Alabama of the importance of protecting their natural resources. (1938 CCC District D Annual)

In July 1933, State Forester Bunker explained the type of work that the CCC could conduct on privately owned land. As reported by *The Florida News* on July 20, the government was "prepared to do certain work on private lands to put them back into condition for increased and continuous production of timber." Colonel Bunker had received many requests from landowners. Authorized activities included the construction of firebreaks, wood observation towers, truck trails, telephone lines (to connect the fire towers), emergency fire control landing fields, and protective structures such as cabins and tool sheds. The CCC could also reduce fire hazards, control insect epidemics, fight forest fires, and control erosion and floods. Planting trees on private land was not authorized. Landowners were to maintain and continue the work started by the CCC.

In July 1933, two more private forestry projects were begun. On July 17, 1933, Company 2423 established Camp P-57 at Glencoe. This company of African-American World War I veterans began erosion control work on private land in Cherokee, Calhoun, St. Clair, DeKalb and Etowah counties. In March 1934, the people of Gadsden heard that the camp was being moved. The *Gadsden Times* reported on March 13 that the Chamber of Commerce had wired Senators Black and Bankhead as well as Congressman Allgood to stop the move. By April 1934, the work project consisted of soil erosion control work on 5,000 acres by the construction of check dams, control ditches, and tree plantings. Company 2423 was transferred to Corinth, Mississippi, in June 1934, and Company 444 replaced them on the same day to continue the work. Company 444 improved local farms with terraces and check dams, until it was transferred to Tallapoosa County to work on a Soil Conservation Service project.

On July 18, 1933, Camp P-60 was established at Chatom by Company 2420. Their work project consisted of construction of telephone lines, fire breaks, truck trails, bridges, fire towers, dwellings for fire tower watchmen, and fire hazard reduction work. (1934 CCC District G Annual) By 1936, Company 2420 hoped to have all 600,000 acres of Washington County under their protection. They had built three fire tower dwellings, two fire towers, 89 miles of telephone lines, 308 miles of firebreaks, and 229 miles of truck trails, and had completed 339 miles of fire hazard reduction. They spent 10,385 man-days at fire suppression and 2,960 man-days of tower duty. They gathered 1,365 bushels of pinecones for seed collection. When

Washington County was hit with a screwworm plague, the enrollees built 500 flytraps and burned over 2,000 carcasses of cattle. (1936 CCC District G Annual) Camp P-60 was abandoned around March 1938.

On July 15, 1935, Camp P-75 was established at Chapman by Company 4434. By January 1936, this African-American company had a work project scattered over 1,157 square miles, consisting of construction of roads, bridges, lookout towers, cabins, latrines, fences, and telephone lines. The project also included seed collection, road maintenance, and fire hazard reduction. By 1938, the work project encompassed 1,078 square miles, with approximately half of this area being property of the W.T. Smith Lumber Company. The enrollees constructed truck trails, telephone lines, and lookout towers. Camp P-75 was abandoned on December 1, 1939, and Company 4434 transferred to Brewton to establish Camp P-78 to work on private forestlands in Escambia County through March 1942.

On September 20, 1938, Camp P-76 was established at Vredenburgh by Company 4435. The work project of this African-American company was private forestry projects, most likely in Monroe and Wilcox counties. This camp project was approved through the last work period of the CCC, which ended on June 30, 1942.

On May 1, 1939, Company 1485 established Camp P-77 at Uriah at the location of the old Camp SP-3. This work project was private forestry. Bruce Mantel enrolled in the CCC between his junior and senior years of high school in May of 1941, when CCC regulations were changed to allow summer enrollment for students. Prior to this, the enrollment period was for six months. He worked on soil erosion projects on private land. (Mr. Bruce Mantel interview, November 18, 2003)



COMPANY 1483, CAMP S-53 WORK CREW, 1934

(AUTHOR'S COLLECTION)

James Mills, “looking for adventure,” spent a month or so at Camp P-77 working on a road surveying crew. He was soon promoted to leader, earning \$45 each month, and ran the company canteen in camp. After finding the work “too confining,” he returned to the survey crew. (Mr. James Mills interview, October 28, 2003)

Company 1485 was disbanded in July 1941, and Company 3477, an African-American company that had been working on the Talladega National Forest since 1935, arrived in the camp on July 11, 1941. On November 16, 1941, Company 3477 was transferred to Camp SCS-14 at Dothan.

On July 2, 1940, Camp P-79 was established at Robertsedale to assist in the fire protection of the forested lands in Baldwin County. The county had been divided into four districts, according to a March 7, 1940, article in *The Onlooker*, and “Forest Riders” patrolled the forests, protecting several thousand acres. Landowners were charged six cents per acre for this protection. The CCC camp would help with the additional fire towers being considered. Camp P-79 was approved through March 1942.

Camp P-80 was established at Dadeville on July 6, 1940, by Company 5488. The enrollees worked on reforestation and fire protection on private land in Tallapoosa County. Camp P-80 was abandoned around September 30, 1941.

On August 8, 1940, Company 3490 established Camp P-81 at Bessemer. This work project on privately owned lands progressed satisfactorily, according to inspection reports. But by September 1941, it was difficult maintaining full company strength of over 200 men with the improved economy and better job opportunities. National Defense Training had become almost as important as the project work. Following the attack on Pearl Harbor and the United States’ entry into World War II, it was even more difficult to maintain full companies. In April 1942, just before the camp was abandoned, Company 3490 had only 86 men. They maintained a work project area within a 25-mile radius from camp, with five fire towers completed and another four to be built; 47 miles of telephone line completed and another 37 under construction; eight miles of truck trails completed with three miles under construction and another 30 miles planned.

## A Great and Lasting Good

When the Civilian Conservation Corps came to an end on July 1, 1942, due to Congress refusing to fund the program, a great deal of work had been accomplished in a little over nine years. On July 16, 1942, *The Moulton Advertiser* reported on the “Great and Lasting Good” of the CCC, listing the work done in Alabama. The article did not break out their achievements by project, so miles of roads and firebreaks, and fire towers constructed, for example, are all combined whether they were built on national forests, state land, or privately owned land. The article did however report that due to the CCC’s improvements in fire protection, it was possible for the State Division of Forestry to improve fire control on thousands of acres of private timberland. On January 1, 1942, over 9.5 million acres of state and private forestlands in Alabama were under protection.



COMPANY 1485 (CAMP S-52 AT CHUNCHULA) BUILDING A BRIDGE IN 1934

(AUTHOR'S COLLECTION)

By 1943, Alabama had over 18 million acres of forested land, with over 9 million acres under organized protection of the State Division of Forestry. The ultimate goal of this division was to place all state and privately owned acres under protection. The State of Alabama was producing a tree crop estimated at \$150 million annually. The major focus of the Division of Forestry was the protection of the forested lands from uncontrolled forest fires. (Alabama Department of Conservation 1944:7-11) The work of the Civilian Conservation Corps helped the Alabama Department of Conservation reach this goal. ♣

Editor's Note: To learn more about the history and legacy of the CCC, read *The Civilian Conservation Corps in Alabama, 1933-1942, A Great and Lasting Good* by Robert G. Pasquill, Jr. This book is available through The University of Alabama Press.

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