

ROBERT MCCULLAGH ARCHIVAL DOCUMENT

Interviewee: Robert “Bob” Patterson McCullagh

Interviewer: Dorothy Nichols; Jeanine McCullagh (wife) and Martin Smith (friend)

Archival Processors: Katy Shenk and Mairin Corasaniti

Copyeditors: Erica Fugger and Cameron Vanderscoff

Date: May 17, 1992

Location: Morro Bay, California

Session Number: 1

Project: National Home Front Project

Interview Contributor: Four Men of Peace and an Episcopalian

Accession Number: McCullaghRobert_HFN-OH_051792

ABSTRACT

Biography

Robert “Bob” Patterson McCullagh was born in 1915 in Monrovia, California. After high school, he was drafted and subsequently enlisted as a conscientious objector during World War II based on his religion. Robert was sent to Three Rivers Camp, a Mennonite-run Civilian Public Service camp in California under the direction of the National Forest Service. After later serving in the print shop at the Ohio State Hospital for the Criminally Insane, Robert volunteered to participate in the Semi-starvation Experiment conducted at the University of Minnesota. At the conclusion of the experiment, Robert returned to Three Rivers Camp, where he was discharged.

After the war, he attended seminary and became ordained in the United Methodist Church, working for thirty-one years in their ministries at the University of California, Los Angeles, the University of South Dakota, the University of Hawaii, California Polytechnic State University at San Luis Obispo, and Morro Bay. Robert later retired to San Diego, California.

Summary

In this interview, Robert recalls being denied conscientious objector status by his draft board and appealing the decision. He recounts working at Three Rivers Camp and wanting to serve his country by participating in a semi-starvation experiment. He further discusses undergoing the phases of the experiment and the feeling of starvation. Robert also describes the attitude of conscientious objectors who were kept in camps after the war had ended.

Keywords

conscientious objector, Methodist, draft board, Three Rivers Camp, Forest Service, Civilian Public Service, guinea pig, semi-starvation experiment, University of Minnesota, minister

INDEX

- 00:00 – Introduction
- 00:22 – Working as a printer in Los Angeles after high school; attending UCLA; being drafted
- 00:59 – Completing seminary degree after the war; working in Methodist campus ministry
- 02:37 – Participating in Methodist youth programs; developing pacifist approach to conflict
- 04:03 – Methodism was not a historic Peace Church, but had a social gospel emphasis in 1940s
- 04:56 – National Methodist Youth Conference; group deciding to oppose conscription
- 06:46 – Local draft board was unwilling to grant CO classification; appealing to Department of Justice
- 09:05 – Alternative to enlisting as a CO was avoiding induction and risking imprisonment
- 11:36 – Most friends served in the military, but felt supported by friends and classmates
- 12:50 – Treatment by the public; young man not in uniform was obvious
- 13:58 – Ignored by attendants at state mental institution in Ohio due to CO status
- 15:51 – Assigned to camp at Sequoia National Park operated by Mennonite Central Committee
- 18:22 – Arrival at Three Rivers Camp; introduced to Amish man who had never met a Methodist
- 19:45 – Assigned to clear fire trails and meadow for new park headquarters, line trails
- 22:38 – Camps started by HPCs who approached the Selective Service to create the CPS
- 25:27 – Working on road beautification project at Three Rivers; drilling rocks
- 28:19 – Transferred to State Hospital for the Criminally Insane in Ohio to run print shop
- 29:40 – Approached CPS to be reassigned; asking to become a “guinea pig” for semi-starvation project at University of Minnesota
- 32:30 – Paid \$1 per day at the camp; not paid at the State Hospital or on semi-starvation unit
- 34:07 – Competition among COs to participate in “guinea pig” projects
- 35:40 – Semi-starvation experiment designed to develop ways to rehabilitate starved individuals
- 37:42 – Procedure began by standardizing men’s learning through tests as a control group
- 40:33 – Reducing body weight in the first twenty-four weeks, initially 145 pounds; moving into semi-starvation phase
- 43:20 – By end of experiment, weighed 102 pounds
- 44:24 – Living conditions; slept in barracks, shared showers, doctors were available
- 46:32 – Experiment required men to still be able to walk; testing on treadmills
- 48:12 – Divided into four groups at the end of twenty-four-week starvation period

49:21 – Feeling of starvation and progression out of it; less energy, harder to focus

54:18 – Rehabilitation process; didn't recover as quickly as expected, calories increased

57:46 – Some men asked to stay for an additional eight weeks for monitoring, a total twenty weeks of recovery

58:49 – Told by men in starvation and vitamin experiments that he “lost his sense of humor”

59:58 – Men getting in a fight over gingerbread; possessiveness over food portions

1:01:40 – Not paid by university for participation; pay came from Historic Peace Churches

1:02:14 – Recalling fellow COs in experiment unit; attending law classes with friend Max

1:04:38 – Recognized by Life Magazine; during experiment, media was not allowed to cover story

1:07:12 – COs rarely given credit for service; recalls aiding Forest Service rescue crews

1:11:23 – Work assigned to COs was usually of national importance; CO efforts were meaningful

1:13:07 – Effect of CO work in the mental institutions; treating patients with respect and care

1:17:57 – Looking at photographs taken during experiment; men participating in tests; weighing food; photos of staff

1:25:19 – Men were weighed underwater by hanging on a bar; administration of Dr. Josef Brozek

1:29:43 – Reflecting on significance of starvation experiments; evaluation by surgeon general

1:30:57 – Results of study published by Dr. Keyes and Dr. Brozek, “Study of Semi-Starvation in the Human Male”

1:32:12 – Other guinea pig projects; University of Minnesota's vitamin experiments

1:34:05 – COs who wanted to go abroad; “cowboys”; shipping heifers overseas

1:35:28 – COs accumulated “points” based on number of months in service; retained after war

1:36:41 – Returning to Three Rivers Camp to complete service; transferring to another camp to await discharge

1:39:20 – Receiving financial support from family and Methodist community during service

1:40:50 – Declining leader position at camp; didn't want to be part of conscription administration

1:42:12 – Consequences of refusing to obey orders; labeled as non-cooperative, face charges

1:44:27 – Receiving discharge from service in June of 1946 and leaving camp the same day

1:45:38 – Quaker camps were more likely to strike; men were educated and socially active
1:47:26 – Interaction with men of different backgrounds in CPS, yet with same convictions
1:49:44 – Opinion on prisoners of war being paid for their work; not resentful toward military
1:51:08 – Recalls letter from friend who liberated concentration camps in Germany
1:54:34 – Learning about and reacting to the Holocaust as a CO; the evils of war
1:57:02 – Looking back on the war from today’s perspective; decision to become a CO
1:58:17 – War is not a lasting solution to preventing basic world problems
1:59:12 – Conclusion

STORY TRANSCRIPTS

Story 1: Opposing Conscription

[04:56 – 05:59]

I can recall in 1940, I was at Wynona Lake, Indiana, for a National Conference of Methodist Youth, I think it was, around Labor Day. Conscription was before Congress, as I recall. But during that conference we decided—somebody decided—that they would print up handbills, I think it was something like “Let Freedom Ring,” urging people to contact Congress to oppose conscription.

They gave us these handbills that we dispersed around Labor Day. And on our way home, we were supposed to stop and hand these out in parks where people were meeting. So we did that on Labor Day in 1940, and that was an outgrowth of where the national Methodist Youth had a strong emphasis in opposition to war.

Story 2: Trouble with the Draft Board

[07:50 – 09:05]

The board really did not want to classify me as a conscientious objector, and they didn’t. They told me that I wouldn’t be able to find a Methodist minister who would support me in my position. I was somewhat surprised at that statement because I thought that the pastor of the church would. And I was quite sure that I could have gotten at least a hundred ministers in the conference who knew me when I was president of the Conference Youth Organization, who would have at least said a good word for me.

But the local board did turn me down, and I had to appeal it. I went through an appeal process, ultimately going before, I think it was a Department of Justice hearing agent. And I had about an hour, hour-and-a-half conversation with him, and subsequently he apparently recommended that I be granted the 4-E classification.

Story 3: Meeting an Amish Man

[18:25 – 19:42]

I started out in a base camp at Three Rivers at Ash Mountain where the Park Service had its headquarters. But it was the summertime and they wanted men up on top in Giant Forest Village. So, I was sent to a side camp at Marble Fork. There, as I recall, as I went in the building—it was an old barracks-type building left over from the CCC [Civilian Conservation Corps] days—one of the fellows got up off his bunk and came walking down to me with a full beard. And I figured he was probably Amish.

He came up to me and he said, “Hello, I’m Enos Hershberger.” So, I told him that I was Bob McCullagh. And he went on to say he was Amish, and what was I? And I said, “I’m a Methodist.” I’ll always remember that Enos’ response was, “Well, I’ve heard of them,” which took me back. I thought everybody had heard of Methodists. But here was this Amish, and his way of sort of identifying and trying to make me feel at home was at least he’d heard of Methodists.

Story 4: Becoming a “Guinea Pig”

[29:33 – 31:57]

I was in Lima [Ohio] for, it was about eight months at Lima through that summer. By that time, I’d done all the printing that they needed done. The print shop had been run by a patient prior to my coming there, and he apparently did not work too hard. And I didn’t have any trouble doing all the work they needed.

That was after D-Day in Europe. I had friends who were in the invasion and were going through Europe at that time, and I really didn’t feel I was doing much in the hospital in Lima. So I walked into the office of the CPS administrator—and we were a small unit, only about twelve men—and went in to him to tell him that I was at about the point where I would give up my 4-E classification, and that I would go as a noncombatant into military service, probably as a medical corpsman.

And before I could say anything to him about what I was thinking, he said, “We’ve got a letter from the [Mennonite] Central Committee. They want to know if you would be interested in being a guinea pig in an experiment?” So, I didn’t say anything about what was on my mind. I said, “Well, what’s the experiment?” And he said, “It’s going to be done at the University of Minnesota, and they want to study semi-starvation.” And so, I said, “Yeah, go ahead, send the papers through and see if they want me.” So, in that sense, it was very fortunate that I was in a Mennonite camp because the Mennonites, really, actually volunteered me for the experiment. Whereas men in Quaker camps, there were all sorts of men who wanted to get into the units. There was real competition to get into the starvation.

Story 5: The Feeling of Starvation

[49:31 – 51:13]

Well, in starvation, I guess there was the awareness that—well, you knew you were losing weight, ‘cause you had to weigh every day on scales. You did not have as much energy. Apparently, we noticed the cold more, although fortunately we were starving in the summer.

And you didn’t concentrate as much. I recall that they had us working; they wanted us to work and do different things. And I worked in the lab as a statistician. I finally got to the point that I told them I said, “I have absolutely no confidence in what I’m doing. I don’t know whether these figures are right or not. If you want to take them, okay!” And that really was not like me, but it just was at the point where I had just lost confidence in that I was concentrating on what I was doing.

Other individuals would express it in different ways. Some individuals collected cookbooks. They got obsessed with food. They couldn’t eat it, so they would read about it.

Story 6: A Fight Over Gingerbread

[59:55 – 1:00:37]

One night, we were eating; I vaguely remember it. And one of the things we had was gingerbread. Just one of the fellas bumped into the fella next to him, his gingerbread, and they really about got in a fight over it, of touching his gingerbread. Which really indicated the possessiveness of *your* food, and somebody else couldn’t mess with it. And they nearly came to blows over that, just a piece of gingerbread.

Story 7: Finally Discharged

[1:44:14 – 1:45:25]

As I recall, I was working in the nursery in Placerville, picking weeds out of where they were growing pine trees to reforest areas. At noon, somebody from the camp came over and said, “Your discharge has come through.” And I left at that spot at noon. I finished eating lunch, I walked down from that to the highway, put up my thumb to ride back to the camp, walked into the camp, and told them here I was ready to leave. And by that evening I had packed my stuff and I was out of the camp.

Now that seems crazy, but it was important that you were antsy. And it was time to get out and that you weren’t giving them any more time than they’d asked, although you’d done all of the rest of this. And I think, if you talked to many of the men, that they did have trouble in camps of men refusing to work towards the end because they felt that it was punishment that they were being kept in and there wasn’t any valid reason for them.

Story 8: War and Forest Fires

[1:58:17 – 1:59:15]

I think that somebody has to make a statement that we've gotta find out other ways to solve these difficulties than going to war. War may stop things, but it doesn't solve the basic problems. And we just have to keep working at that, to see if we can't discover ways to solve these basic problems. And we do that in the—well, even in the Park Service, you work out ways of trying to prevent fires. You'd rather not fight the fires; it's better to work out something to prevent the fires. I think the same thing holds in the world situation, that we need to work out ways to prevent this from happening.

PHOTO CAPTIONS

Current 1 – 2

Robert McCullagh photographed on the day of his interview (Photo Credit: Dorothy Nichols)

Artifact 1

Photograph of Robert “Bob” Patterson McCullagh seated, taken while he was in the Civilian Public Service participating in the Semi-starvation Experiment at the University of Minnesota between 1943 and 1945 (Courtesy of Bob McCullagh)

Artifact 2

Semi-starvation Experiment article from World War II (Courtesy of the Malcolm I. Nichols Peace Collection)

Artifact 3

Civilian Public Service World War II conscientious objectors who were participants in the Semi-starvation Experiment at the University of Minnesota, 1944-1945 (Courtesy of Bob McCullagh)

Artifact 4

The laboratory on the campus of the University of Minnesota where Civilian Public Service participants in the Semi-starvation Experiment were tested (Courtesy of Bob McCullagh)

Artifact 5

Bob McCullagh (on far right) taking a coordination test while participating in the Semi-starvation Experiment (Courtesy of Bob McCullagh)

Artifact 6

Lab technician with laboratory equipment used in the Semi-starvation Experiment (Courtesy of Bob McCullagh)

Artifact 7

A meal being heartily consumed by conscientious objectors in the Semi-starvation Experiment (Courtesy of Bob McCullagh)

Artifact 8

Participant in the Semi-starvation Experiment doing a coordination test at the University of Minnesota (Courtesy of Bob McCullagh)

Artifact 9

Conscientious objector having his blood drawn for the Semi-Starvation Experiment (Courtesy of Bob McCullagh)

Artifact 10

Civilian Public Service members of the Semi-starvation Experiment doing an unknown task at the University of Minnesota (Courtesy of Bob McCullagh)

Artifact 11

Strength testing for the Semi-starvation Experiment (Courtesy of Bob McCullagh)

Artifact 12

A nurse testing Bob McCullagh's lungs for the Semi-starvation Experiment (Courtesy of Bob McCullagh)

Artifact 13

A nurse testing Bob McCullagh's heart for the Semi-starvation Experiment (Courtesy of Bob McCullagh)

Artifact 14

Bob McCullagh with a case of edema fluid retention during the Semi-starvation Experiment (Courtesy of Bob McCullagh)

Artifact 15

A participant in the Semi-starvation Experiment seated at his desk (Courtesy of Bob McCullagh)

Artifact 16

Doctors running tests on a conscientious objector participating in the Semi-starvation Experiment (Courtesy of Bob McCullagh)

Artifact 17

A discussion to determine the moods of conscientious objectors in the Semi-starvation Experiment (Courtesy of Bob McCullagh)

Artifact 18

A Semi-starvation Experiment meal (Courtesy of Bob McCullagh)

Artifact 19

Bob McCullagh (on right) with another conscientious objector in the Semi-starvation Experiment (Courtesy of Bob McCullagh)

Artifact 20 – 21

Bob McCullagh (on left) with another conscientious objector in the Semi-starvation Experiment (Courtesy of Bob McCullagh)

Artifact 22

Semi-starvation Experiment participants looking at food they cannot eat (Courtesy of Bob McCullagh)

Artifact 23 – 25

COs who were members of the Semi-starvation Experiment relaxing; Bob McCullagh may be on the left (Courtesy of Bob McCullagh)

Artifact 26

Man attempting to keep Semi-starvation Experiment volunteer from falling off of the dreaded treadmill during testing (Courtesy of Bob McCullagh)

Artifact 27

Man typing during the Semi-starvation Experiment (Courtesy of Bob McCullagh)

Artifact 28 – 30

Testing a participant in the Semi-starvation Experiment (Courtesy of Bob McCullagh)

Artifact 31

University of Minnesota, circa 1944-1945 (Courtesy of Bob McCullagh)

Artifact 32 – 35

Meal given to conscientious objector volunteers in the Semi-Starvation Experiment (Courtesy of Bob McCullagh)

Artifact 36

The dreaded treadmill test of a participant in the Semi-starvation Experiment (Courtesy of Bob McCullagh)

Artifact 37

Weighing a Semi-starvation Experiment participant (Courtesy of Bob McCullagh)