

Interview with Charlie Peritore

CP: Charles Peritore. My present position, I'm chair of the retirees' division of CSEA and also chair and known as president of chapter 1000 Of AFSCME. We are the biggest chapter of AFSCME, retiree chapter that is, we are the biggest chapter of all the retirees in the country, international, what have you. I believe right now the retirees in AFSCME is about 220,000, something like that, retirees of which, we have about 61,000 of CSEA members that, belong to the AFSCME retiree chapter. We're the biggest.

FV: All right. Let's go back to your beginnings with CSEA.

CP: Okay. All right. Let me see. When I first got out of service, that was in 1946. Well, I didn't do too much after 1946. I think I did join CSEA at that time but I wasn't too active there. I was acclimating myself, you know. And uh, to make a long story short, I became president of 405.

FV: We want to make a long story longer. Don't skimp on any details.

CP: All right. Let's back up then. I was the negotiating team for the Department of Mental Hygiene. The commissioners; I can't remember the commissioners but we had good times with them anyway. But we were on the negotiating team there. I served on that team for quite a few years and finally became president of 405. At that time, today it's known as Craig Developmental center. At that time, it was known as Craig State School and Hospital. But if you go back further than that, it was called an institution at that time. It was an institution for the epileptics. It was the Craig Colony and then it became the Craig State School. Then it became Craig State School and Hospital. The name changed several, several times. Up to the present time now... Oh, we had a school of nursing there too. I know a lot of our people got their RN degree from the school of nursing at Craig State. And then, 405, as I said, I became president there. It seems like I'm repeating myself, aren't I?

FV: Let's go back to when you were on the negotiating team. What kind of things did you negotiate?

CP: Salary, primarily. And then time. Because when we first started working at Craig we were working 48 hours a week and one of the things we negotiated, we got it down to 44 hours a week and, of course, what we attempted to work in there at that time too, reduce our hours at the same pay so we didn't lose any of it. And then we negotiated to 40 hours a week. Still, we negotiated again at the same pay.

FV: Who were you dealing with?

CP: I can't remember the...

FV: The commissioner.

CP: Yeah, the commissioner. The commission of mental hygiene.

FV: How many people on each side of the table?

CP: Well, generally, well there was the commissioner and the assistant commissioner and then we had a couple of people on CSEA's side and we probably had eight or nine.

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FV: Did anybody come from Albany?

CP: Yeah. They came from all over the state.

FV: Anybody come from CSEA?

CP: Yeah, from all over, they were all from CSEA. They were all.

FV: Can you name any of them?

CP: Let's see. Most of them have passed away now. Um, where was it? I can't think of their names now. But she was a firecracker anyway. She was from Pilgrim State and that lady there, she was a firecracker, I'll tell you. Oh man, she'd get up on that table and pound that desk, you know, and...

FV: Not Rita Wallace?

CP: No, it's not Rita. It's similar to Rita though.

FV: We talked to Rita in Long Island.

CP: Oh, did you now?

FV: Yeah. She's still a firecracker. Anyway, Pilgrim State.

CP: Pilgrim State. All right. Now, this girl was so dedicated to CSEA. She was an RN and she couldn't belong because of the professionalism. She gave that UP. Yes, she did. Took a cut in pay so she could belong to CSEA and be active. And there was another one who became a retiree president today is Eileen...Oh, I'm a stinker for names, you know. But she's I the Long Island region too. And she is...Well, I can read some names. Do you want me to do that?

FV: Sure.

CP: She's in 910 today. And she was on the negotiating team at that time too. Irene Hillis. She's president of Local 901. Region 2 we call it. And her address is Staten Island. She's from Staten Island. And all of these; we've got 22 locals and all of these are retiree presidents they have. Now the others that I gave you like Ed Blodgett, I have his address here. Dolores Andress, I've got it there too if you care to have it later or now or whenever. And Barbara Benicke. That's region alone. This is Region 6. This is the entire state of New York.

FV: Okay. Let's go back to the time of these negotiations. Tell me any stories you remember, what they were getting their dander up about.

CP: Well, mostly as I said, it was time and pay and seniority. I always liked seniority, which I don't know if they do too much of that today with the seniority, you know. That was another issue too, was seniority.

FV: Okay. So on from there, that's when it was Craig. Which Craig was it at that point?

CP: Ah, let's see. Craig Colony at that point.

FV: What year was this?

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CP: Let's see, 146, '47. Probably about 148; just a guess 1948.

FV: You saw people from Albany that came here to help with the negotiations Did you go to Albany?

CP: Oh no. we went to Albany for negotiation-

FV: Oh. You went to Albany.

CP: Yes, they didn't come here.

FV: And where would you go?

CP: We would go to the headquarters of Mental Hygiene, the commissioner's place...

FV: So you didn't go to Elk Street, you went to...

CP: No, no. We went right there.

FV: Okay. So, tell me what it was like in those days. How you go there, where people hung out and, you know.

CP: Well, at that time, like you mentioned, our headquarters at that time was 33 Elk Street. And we'd go to negotiations and we'd take a break from time to time and right next to 33 Elk there was a restaurant or bar or whatever you want to call it where we had an occasional..

FV: Was it the 21?

CP: 21 I believe it was.

FV: I used to Work on Elk Street.

CP: Did you?

FV: Yeah. So what went on there?

CP: Well, as the old saying goes, you can get more done at the bar than you can at a meeting. So we just had some discussions there too and came to some agreements there so by the time we did get to the meeting, we knew pretty well what we were going to do and what we were going to say too. And the commissioner would be with us too.

FV: I think a lot of political progress was made at the 21. I worked in an ad agency up the street, it was at 15 Elk in -those days and we used to go in there with our boss once in awhile. I would see people discussing things in shadowy corners. I didn't know what was going on but that's probably what was going on even in the 60's. But you're talking the 50's now.

CP: Yeah.

FV: Do you remember any of the people that used to be hanging around at the 21?

CP: No. Like I said, names, you know...

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FV: Or stories; it doesn't have to be names. It can be stories. Funny things...

CP: Yeah. You see, I can see their faces. I remember a couple of staff people in CSEA. He was a son-of-a-gun there too. Bob, I can remember his first name was Bob and that's going way back. I think he died, he passed away too. He was a son-of-a-gun. He was a rough and tumble guy, you know. Maybe I shouldn't say this but he wasn't the diplomatic kind, you know? He might have called you a son-of-a-bitch, he'd call you that, no matter who it is, see? And things of that nature there. And we got things done, that was the tough part of it. We got things done. And at the end of the day, we were really tired. And we took it from there. That's going way back. I guess that I've been with CSEA, well I joined in 146, I believe it was and all the way up. And thinking, 146, you know that's quite a few years back. It's kind of difficult to remember the names.

FV: It's only 56 years. I think I've got socks that old. So anything you remember from there on. Details, that's what the history's all about, these sessions at the 21 and the Ambassador, I think was the other place on Elk Street.

CP: Yeah, yeah, the Ambassador, that's familiar. Well that's as far as negotiations are concerned but as far as my own local at that time... We used to have and I've got the pictures up there yet. When we get together...of course at that time, I had about 2300 members, this is not the retiree local, it's the employee local and we'd have a Valentine's ball and we'd get 500, 600 people. And that was held at a place there at Craig called Shanahan Hall. We'd have the Valentine Ball and we'd have two or three balls a year and we'd get real good turnouts. And sometimes some of them would get a little bit too much, you know. But we'd enjoy ourselves.

FV: Did you have bands?

CP: Oh yeah, we had a band and we had dancing.

FV: Big bands, local bands?

CP: Well, we didn't have any big name bands. Local bands, some out of Rochester, some out of Buffalo, you know. And then at that time we'd have the president come down of CSEA and vice president and the regional president. I know Bob Lattimer used to come down, the regional president. I used to say that headquarters was composed of Irishmen. They used to talk about the Italian Mafia. I said "You got the Irish Mafia right here."

FV: We talked to Bob in Albany last spring and I'm going to see him again tomorrow, with Ramona. What do you remember about him in those days? I can remind him when I talk to him.

CP: Well, he was always outspoken but he knew what he was doing. He knew what he was saying. And sometimes he was too outspoken and people didn't like that but he didn't say anything that wasn't a fact, that wasn't the truth. He wasn't the most diplomatic person, and I'm sure you know that. But he was a good man. He knew what he was doing and he would speak his piece and held get things done. So I can say that about Bob.

FV: Oh yeah, He called himself a son-of-a-bitch twice when I interviewed him. But he knew what he wanted, like you said.

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CP: True.

FV: Who else was around in those days?

CP: Well, let's see. Wenzel was president and then, you remember Ted Wenzel, do you? Do you know of him?

FV: I think...

CP: And I'm trying to think of another Irishman who was vice president too. All I can think of it was Shanahan but I know it isn't that. It was another Irishman vice president and then. He was good. They were all pretty much Irishmen on the CSEA. Now, they are getting a little bit different. Now they've got the Italian Mafia in there, not the Irish Mafia. But you still got Danny and you still got Barbara, Mary, Mary Sullivan. So it's getting balanced.

FV: So how often be do you go to Albany for negotiations?

CP: Well, negotiations were once a year but the negotiations may last two or three days and then we'd come back. Sometimes longer, depending what progress was made, you know.

FV: What kind of the things went on in both Western part of the state?

CP: well, in both Western part of the state...in those days, they've weren't called regions, they will called conferences, okay? And nobody got paid. The regional or, I keep calling them regional president, the conference president didn't get paid up until a certain time and then they had what they called an honorarium and they started off and that was a big surprise with \$3000 a year. The conference president, which today is known as the regional president. Well there's quite a bit of difference in pay between then and today. There were conferences, as I said but now its regions. In this area it's region 6.

FV: There were annual conventions back then?

CP: there were two conventions here then. Two conventions, then they cut down to one. Not too long ago they cut that down but there were two a year then.

FV: Well, did they have two?

CP: Oh, I don't know. They thought they needed it, I guess. There was a big reorganization of CSEA. Were you around when it was reorganized into regions and ... ?

FV: No. You will we were around the common you tell us about it.

CP: At that time they had what they called a reorganization of CSER and the conferences became regions and then this is where we had Albert president and vice president and they named all the regional president's now vice presidents and it was a big reorganization altogether. There was a man called Victor Costa who was responsible for this reorganization. I can remember him and the constitution and by-laws. And he'd get up there and some people didn't like him. But he knew what he was doing, he was a little short fellow and he demanded your attention when he was talking. Well there was nothing wrong with that because

you know how some people are, there are talking, the speaker's trying to tell you something and you can't hear. He demanded attention. Held stop. By the way, that I s the way I run my organization too. I see somebody talking, they are not paying attention, I'll just stop. You can hear a pin drop pretty soon. And they look up and we start in again. But that's the type Victor was. He was a good man.

FV: What year was this? The reorganization?

CP: Reorganization, this is just a guess again, reorganization, I would say about 1980. That's 20 years, yeah, yeah, maybe a little bit before that. And again, that's a guess.

FV: What was the reason for it?

CP: For the reorganization? Because at one time the CSEA was known as a social organization. And I think it was in 1720 the year of the strike? That's when we went from becoming a social organization to a union. I remember at that time I was one of few locals that practically closed down. It wasn't the popular thing to do. They practically closed down my institution there and just left them with the supervisors. I remember I had six entrances to the place, this is the year of the strike. I think it was an Easter, Easter Sunday I believe it was. I remember I think there were six entrances. I had a very important meeting but let me back that up a little bit cause that was a good one there I was in a good with the director, the director, he respected me. He knew when I had something, that when I go there and talk and I didn't go there for any little trivial thing. So he respected me in that respect. Well, then I found out that day that... we used to hold our meetings at the place called Shanahan Hall, right on the grounds. Paid knew what he were thinking about going on the strike and so I remember the director calling me and he said "Charlie, you can't called your meeting here today because it's coming from Albany that you might be going on strike and I've got my orders that you can't hold your meeting here." And I said "Okay." I said too "Do me a favor, will you Doc?" And he says "What's that?" I said "Now you've got a supervisors' meeting coming up this afternoon, right?" He says "Yeah." I said "Would you notify all the supervisors that I'm having an emergency meeting down at the VFW tonight?" "Sure thing." So at the supervisors' meeting, he notified all the supervisors "Now when you go back to your divisions, let everybody know that Charlie's having a meeting at the VFW. A special meeting." So sure enough, I'm holding the meeting that night and, boy, they were all there. They were hanging out the windows, it was so crowded. And they were all there. I had a table all set up and I had one officer that was against it all. I said "Well, I'm just going to present the facts and I'll let them make the decision, not me, not you, not any of the officers. Present the facts and let them make the decision." And then, I had it set up pretty good. It was psychological in a way, you know. I had the officers' table here and then I had a table here with six chairs. Nobody knew what that table was for, see. So after I got to talking with the people and, I'm thinking of the staff in Albany at the time was with me. Johnson, Gary Johnson was staff from Albany. He was sitting there with me. And I explained to the people, I says "Okay, I'm not here for the purpose to work you up and to say 'Let's go on strike.'" I said "My prime purpose for this is to let you know what we're going to lose, what we're going to gain, if anything, and by our inaction, then you people..." And I had doctors there and supervisors too. "What we're going to lose. What there asking us to do." Then I said again "I'm not here to soup you up or anything. It's up to you to make the decision." And I explained it and I had a list of all the things we could lose and what they were trying to take away from US. And after I got all done, I says "Okay" I says 'now,' well there

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were questions there by everybody, you know. I says "Okay, now you've heard it all, now I'm going to leave it up to you. Now I'm going to have the officers here each go over to that table and each take a gate and you're gonna be the captain of that gate" and I wanted them to set them, there'd be gate 1, gate 2, gate 3, right on up to 6. "There will be a captain at each one and whatever gate you want to be at, you go and sign up. And I want you to give him or her your name and when you'll be available. We can pull shifts and so on and so forth. And then this other table here, I've got another guy from Maintenance. He'll be going around with coffee and doughnuts. Anytime you need that, he'll be going around. Then just down the road, there's an American Legion post there." It was just about right off the grounds. "American Legion post," I says, "now I'll set up my headquarters there and as you come in, you can let us know if you've got any problems, what have you, if you want to take a break, you tell the captain, you come right down to the Legion post, lay down, have coffee, doughnuts, in addition to my man going around with coffee and doughnuts. Take a rest." I says "Okay, now comes the big thing. These people are going over there and I'm gonna give you 20 minutes, remember that. I'm gonna give you 20 minutes to sign up," They all, just about all of them, got up. With the exception of the doctors and supervisors although I had a super-visor on that committee as one of the captains, that was before the professionals could belong to CSEA, see. And they each went and signed up. Now, Gary Johnson, I guess he called up headquarters and he called up Buffalo and he says "Hey, it's a go here. I don't know about the rest of the state but these people allergic rhinitis going." And we were one of the few. I think Pilgrim State may have gone but not like we did. We were the strongest. The smallest local but we were the strongest in there. And they went and they signed up. And the next day he says "Okay. CSEA says it's on." So we just manned our posts and I would go around from post to post, seeing that everything was all right. And it was cold, it was cold. And then after doing that I'd go back to the Legion post there and I'd sit there and wait and then I'd go out again. And then we, I remember a TV station called me up from Rochester and they said "We'd like to interview you. Come on up to Rochester and we'd like to have you speak up here." I says "Nope. My position is right here. This is where I belong, with my local and my people, not up in Rochester." "Yeah but there's a fellow named Sam Goodwin" (I think his name was, he was the president of Rochester at the time). I said "No, this is where I belong." So that's where I stayed. And that's the way we went.

FV: How long were you out.

CP: Two days. Oh, and another thing. Now, you want to know details.

FV: Oh yeah.

CP: I come back to the house, I don't know what for but before I came back, my secretary, who, by the way, was the director's secretary, and she called me up and she said "Charlie, they're looking for you. And they're gonna arrest you. Be careful when you go back to the house, they'll be waiting for you." I says "Okay." And she says, "By the way, when they arrest you, I'll be there and be the first one to bail you out. So don't worry about it." This is the director's secretary, my secretary too! And she says "So don't worry about it." So, sure enough, when. I got back, there were guys from Albany here, from the attorney general's office and they sat down here and they said "Well,,we're supposed to read this to you." I says "What does it mean?" They said "Well, it tells so many words you're supposed to stop here." I said "What I don't understand is..."

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And they said, "Well, we don't either really." And I said, "I don't understand it. What are you talking about here?" I played the dumb guy, you know, I can do that pretty good, you know. But they were good, they were excellent. And they left and I didn't hear no more about it. They didn't arrest me or nothing." And then I went back and I finally got the word that negotiations were back in and they were going to meet again and settle and discuss it. So I called it all off. I said "Okay, everybody back to work." Oh, I'll back up. You said you wanted some of the funny parts too. I'm at the Legion post, sitting down there and I had my secretary with me. This guy comes in with all his whites on. He says "Could I get a cup of coffee?" I says "Sure. That's what it's there for." But I'm looking at him and I thought I saw some straw in his pants or something like that, you know. I said "Wait a minute. Where did you come from?" He says "Across the field." I says "Where were you?" He says "I was at work." I says "Get your ass outta here." And he walked out. I thought so.

FV: He tried.

CP: Yeah. Then there was another incident. I really felt sorry for the girl. I was sitting there at the post and this young girl come in. She says "I don't know what to do. I want to go in but I don't want to pass those lines." That's another instruction we gave them. I said "You keep moving, keep moving and don't you harass anybody." And she said "I don't want to go past those lines, but I want to go to work." I said "Well, it's up to you. We're not gonna tell you not to, it's up to you." She said, "Well, if you say so, I won't go in" I says, "Yeah, that's my recommendation but it's up to you." And she didn't go in. But I did feel sorry for her. She was crying and what have you. And we had a lot of people like that. We had one or two that did cross the lines and went in. But I left instructions. I said "You're not to harass anybody. They want to go in, okay, you can give them dirty looks if you want." And that was the big strike and when it was over with we were known as one of the locals that turned CSEA from a social organization into a union. And that was the big turning point there. And then, CSEA began to be noticed all over the state as a union. And it began getting bigger and bigger and bigger as what it's know today. It's one of the largest public employee unions in the state. And that was part of the strike there.

FV: And then you got the Rochester TV station to come down and cover it.

CP: Pardon?

FV: Didn't the Rochester TV station come to you?

CP: Did they or didn't they.

FV: Oh, they would have had to.

CP: I think so, I'm pretty sure. Yeah, because they wanted me to go up there and I said "no". Yeah.

FV. That's what it was all about. You can get publicity all over the state after that.

CP: Right, right, yeah.

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CP: Well, then there was another incident. There were a couple of funny incidents, you know. We had a deputy sheriff, who was a member of CSEA and he had to go by and he saw me there. He says "Hi, Charlie. I understand you got everything covered." I says "Yup." He says "Well, just tell them to keep moving. I got a report that somebody was obstructing the entrance here. But (they were right across there) I don't see nothing." And he just kept right on going. He says "See ya." I says "Okay. Goodbye." That was the big issue there. It was pretty good, you know.

FV: Yeah, that's the kind of flavor we want, the details. The human...

CP: Yeah, the human side of it.

FV: Yeah. Like things that happened at the conventions back in the early days. I'm sure that there are stories, maybe not during the convention, but after hours or...

CP: Yeah, yeah. Well, like I said before, after hours a lot was accomplished. Well, at conventions, itself, I was pretty strict. I'd take people to convention and. I'd tell them "I don't care what you do at night but I want you on the floor in the morning." And I said "Each one of you are assigned to a certain place here and I want a report on it." Again, as I said, "I don't care what you do at night but you be sure..." Well, one morning we're all sitting down there and this young girl comes in. Young, I was young at the time too. I was young at the time too. I was young once, believe it or not. (Laughter). And I could tell that she was in a bad way. She had been out the night before. And she stuck it out until about 11:00, see, and she sends a note down to me "Can I go to my room now?" And I look at her and she looked in bad shape. And I says "Okay." And there was a guy that did the same thing and I said "Okay but don't let it happen again. As I said, I don't care what you do at night, but you be here for the meeting, you cover the meeting. You're delegates so you cover the meeting so you can make a report." And I was pretty strict on that always.

FV: Where was the convention held?

CP: Most of our conventions were held in the Catskills at Grossinger's and what's the other one right near Grossinger's? They're both closed now?

FV: The Concord?

CP: The Concord. Yup. And most of them were right there. FV: I think they're turning them into casinos.

CP: Grossinger's?

FV: One of them.

CP: Yeah, yeah. Most of our conventions were all held there.

FV: How many people would be there? Delegates from all over the state, just trying to get an idea of the size of it.

CP: Eight, nine hundred, I guess. But today it's much bigger. I remember one time, too, we had a snowstorm and we were getting ready to come home and, boy, but I seemed to be prepared. The place was just covered with snow. So I says

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"I'm gonna get the car out. So I went to the car. And I had a shovel and I had boots in the car. So I shoveled all around the car. I had put my boots on and everybody else was still waiting back there and saying "You can't get through" and I said "I'm going home." Some of them stayed an extra day, you know. But I made it. I went right through. After I got out of that section it was clear road, all the way home. After I got out of the Catskills.

FV: When was this?

CP: Oh, just a guess, maybe 1985, something like that.

FV: Well, you know I'm in Albany so I don't know a lot of what's been going on out here in the west but what was it like? You know, to go from a social organization to a political organization almost over night?

CP: Just about. Well as the years went by, we became stronger and stronger. And you know, it was an overnight thing but it didn't actually begin overnight because as the years went by, we became stronger and stronger. They never had another strike and what they are today but I think that was the start of it right there.

FV: Is that when the Taylor Law came about?

CP: Yeah. The Taylor Law. Well, the Taylor Law was before the strike so some of our people were penalized, you know. I think they tried to but we got out of that pretty good. They tried to penalize two days for every one that we were on strike. And I can remember some of the excuses when the commissioners representative came down here. Trying to penalize a supervisor who was the vice president of one of the divisions. But we proved she was sick. He did, though, and yeah, the Taylor Law was in effect then. It still is in effect now but I think they're trying to get it repealed or to a certain extent. I don't know exactly what it is today. I think it's still the penalty two for one. But they're trying to ease up on it a little bit.

FV: But it hasn't really been enacted, has it?

CP: No. No.

FV: What do you think you're most proud of from the old days of CSEA in your career?

CP: Well, when we reorganized at that time you know, we had four divisions. We had the PS&T. The professionals. The so-called professionals. I use the word lightly.

FV: Why is that?

CP: Well, at the time, maybe I even shouldn't say this, but it's true. They thought they were a little bit better than the other divisions. You know, you had the maintenance and you had the administrative division and then you had the clerical, they were in with administrative, but you had four divisions, PS&T was one. And then of course you had the mental hygiene division in there and I think that's how they became and got out of CSEA. Because once they were declaring themselves, "Professionals, professionals." Well, we said, "You can no longer belong to CSEA." And so we lost that division, you know. I think they

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were a little sorry about that but today they've got their own union. But we had people stick with CSEA though. Like I told you before so they wouldn't have to go with PS&T.

FV: Yeah. Now, you were active in CSEA before you retired. And how long was that? And then, what I'm trying to do is ... when did you retire is what ...

CP: I retired in 1980.

FV: 1980. So, up until 1980 you were active in CSEA proper, whatever you want to call it.

CP: Yeah.

FV: What else, what other memories have you got from...

CP: Well, I've got the pictures in history right there of CSEA, of our local. Pictures of the parties that we used to have at Shatahan Hall. That big white book there. And I've got Pictures of 405 and all our presidents of all our officers there and went back. Too bad we can't show those in the camera.

FV: We'll get them some other time and we'll do a Ken Burns kind of documentary with all the stills. All right. Now it's 1980, you retire, but you stay active. How do you do that? What's the process?

CP: I didn't. I wasn't for a couple years. Finally, someone came up to me and said, "Charlie, why don't YOU join the retirees." And I says, "Well, I don't know." But I did. I joined the retirees and I went to a meeting, an executive meeting. And to say that I was disturbed is putting it mildly. The president of the meeting of the executive committee sat there crocheting.

FV: Wasn't Rosie Grier, was it? Remember Rosie Grier used to knit and crochet?

CP: So, I didn't say much and there was no organization to the meeting at all, you know. There was no protocol. Everybody was talking. Nothing was getting done. So, I left the meeting. And the girl that asked me to go there, I said, "That's it. I'm not coming back here." I says, "That was asinine, that meeting. That was no meeting," I says "That was just a get-together." I says, "And the president crocheting and wasn't even leading the meeting, wasn't taking charge." And this girl says, "If you run against her I'll run with you as your treasurer." And then the secretary come up at the time and says, "And if you run, I'll be your secretary." I said, "Well, I hate to do that to that girl, because I like her. She's a nice lady." And she was. And some people thought that I shouldn't do it. But they talked me into it and I ran and I ... easily elected, you know. As a matter of fact, the girl that was with me who ran as treasurer was one of my treasurers when I was in the actives. And she is with me today. She could hardly see, but she is still with me today. And we did and from then on...We were just a unit. That was something else. We were just a unit out of Rochester local. And the first thing I said after I became president, I said, "Why are we just a unit out of Rochester?" And they says, "Well, this is the way it's been." And I says, "Okay. Let's be a local." So I talked to the president. Melva Bin was the president of the retiree local now in Rochester and I talked to her and I says, 'Melva, I'm going after...I want to be a local.' I says, "Why be a unit here?" I says, "We've got enough members." She said, "You've got my backing. There's no problem with me." So I laid the groundwork and I found

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out who would be interested in being a local. Took it to headquarters, took it to a board meeting. Says, "These people are interested. They want to become a local." And go to the charter committee. And it was approved. So I became a local.

FV: I think what you're telling me is that if you're active in CSEA you're going to be active in CSEA retirees because you learn the process and you know what CSEA is about. Why don't you tell me in your own words what CSEA is about. Because you're telling me round about. But it's a political organization. They get things done how?

CP: By their political action. We have a political action committee, you know. And naturally, the president has the final say who we endorse, but it goes right down to the regions too. We have a political action in each region, political action committee in each region. Now, insofar as the retirees are concerned, we have the chair of the statewide committee, Dorothy, who comes to all of our meetings too and she's our go-between and our political action chair too. Then each local, retiree local too, has political action committees. Some are active, some are not. Because when you get to that stage, you know, one of the things that the retiree division was a little teed of fat, they said, "Well look, you come to us all the time and just to stuff envelopes." I says, "You know, it isn't right. You should come to us when you need really something. Not just to stuff envelopes. Not to lower us to that category." And I keep telling them, I tell them all at meeting too, "You have a wealth of expertise out there that you're not putting to use. What are you afraid of? Are you afraid of these retirees that they're going to take over? They don't want to take over, they did their time. But use their expertise the best you know how." You know. And that's one of the things. And this is what we're attempting to do. This is what we're attempting to do with the retiree division. And, as a matter of fact, I keep jumping here and there, as a matter of fact, we've never had the right to vote for the officers. And we've always said, "Well look, we're not asking to have the right to vote for your contracts, or your pay raises or anything like that. That's yours. But we should have the right to vote for these officers. They are supposed to be our officers." And, we're having a difficult time with that, but matter of fact, Danny, the president, has just put me on an ad hoc committee to study the right for the retirees to vote for officers. We haven't had a first meeting yet, but ... and I told Danny, I said, "I'm going to fight you on it." And he says, "Yes, I know." And I says, "I'm going to push it as hard as I can." Now, the president and I get along very well together and we probably wouldn't be where we are today if it wasn't for president Danny Donohue. But there's issues that we don't agree on and when we don't agree, we tell each other that. And this is why he's put me on this committee here too. But the division has come a long ways from when it was just first born to where it is today. But we plan to go a lot further. I remember at CSEA conventions I had a terrible fight there. I was the only representative representing 60,000 retirees at CSEA convention. Not the retiree convention. So I tried to make a change in the constitution and I says, "Look, I represent 60,000 retirees and I'm the only one that attends your convention here. We are a division," I says, "At least let me take the vice chair and the secretary as delegates to this convention." I had a big fight there. But I remember the final vote; boy, that did my heart good. The first meeting went through, no problem at all. The second meeting... Joe McDermott, who was the president at that time, remember Joe, do you?

FV: Mm-hm.

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CP: He was the president at the time. And he left the mic and he put Danny in charge of the mic because he wanted to speak against it. He got up and went down on the floor and he says, "Nope. I don't think they should have anymore representation there," and he went on and on and on. And when I got up to the mic I said, "Being the maker of the motion." I says, "I want to reserve the right to be the last one to speak on this motion." I really had a lot of ammunition. And I said, "By the way. The first meeting there was no opposition at all. The second meeting now there's an opposition. Why?" I said, "I'm not a politician. Was this planned this way? Did you figure we'd roll over?" I says, "The first meeting there was no opposition." And I said, "Furthermore, Joe," I spoke to him directly. I said, "Joe, furthermore, you told me that if you gave me this," I says, "You're not giving it to me, the delegate body is. That then I'd be back for more." And I said, "You know something, you're absolutely right. I am going to come back for more." I said, "You get a pay raise today, you're not coming back tomorrow?" And, boy, you could hear all the delegates yell and scream, stomp the floor, you know. And so I had my last say. I was the last speaker. And so Danny has the chair now. And I know that Joe was poking him, he's talking to him, "Get him out. Shut him up!" And so Danny got up and he says, "Okay, we're ready for the vote." And somebody said, "Let's move the question." And he said, "Now, you realize this is going to take a two-thirds vote." "Yup." And there was only one other person that spoke against it. That was Mary Sullivan. All the other officers were for it. But Mary spoke against it, but she should have kept quiet on that. But that was her opinion, but she was sticking up for Joe, the president, and I can understand that. But anyway, he says, "Okay, all in favor, and remember it takes two-thirds vote. All in favor of the motion as written, raise your hand." And it was just like a wave of hands going up. He says, "Well, I don't think there's any question on that." It seemed like every hand. Of course he had to take the negative vote and I don't think there was any in there. And it was passed. And that was something really accomplished there.

FV: Yes, it was. Now when was this approximately?

CP: Where?

FV: When.

CP: Oh, when. This had to be in the 1990s. Yeah, had to be in the 90s.

FV: Early 1990s yeah, when Joe was president. So, how well did you know Joe?

CP: Pretty good. I'd see him now once in a while. I knew Joe...

FV: Any stories about Joe?

CP: Pardon?

FV: Do you have any stories about Joe?

CP: No.

FV: That you don't want to tell, right? You can tell them because I'm going to ask you about Danny too.

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CP: Yeah, I know. No, Joe had his ways, you know. And I used to get a kick out of Joe, though. And everybody got a kick out of him. He was kind of long-winded. And so he'd say, "In conclusion." And, boy, everybody would go, "Yeah!" And then he'd speak for another ten minutes. And again, "In conclusion." "Yeah!"

FV: Think he'd get the hint.

CP: Yeah. That's one thing that I remembered about Joe there. He was a good president. He had his own mind, you know. And he had his own opinion. And aside from that, he ran the organization pretty good. And we didn't always approve what he had to do or say and vice versa. So, but I see him now once in a while. He was at our last convention in, where'd we have it? New York City? Yeah. New York. He was there. He never ... Oh, another thing about Joe, he told me one time. He says, "I'm going to retire, Charlie." I says, "Good, Joe." He says, "But I don't want your job." I says, "Joe, I think you'll find the pay a little bit different from what you're getting and what I'm getting." He looked at me and he just laughed. Of course there's no pay for being the head of the division or the retirees, you know. I get my expenses.

FV: That's what you're going to go for next.

CP: Yeah.

FV: Now what about Danny? What do you know about Danny?

CP: Danny? Well, as I said, under Danny he's been good for me and for us. Don't always agree. You know, there's things that come up that can't agree on. Okay. But at least he respects my opinion and I respect his. And we've got more under President Donohue than we ever have under any other president. The division has progressed more in the things, you know, and gone forward. And one big thing about Danny, though. He doesn't believe in the right for the retirees to vote. And he tells me that and he tells everybody that and he's in the open. You know, he isn't in the back saying, he doesn't tell me, "Yeah, I'm all for you, Charlie." No. He tells me. And I said, "Danny, before I go, I'm going to get you to change your mind. And if I don't change your mind I'm still going to get the right for the retirees at least to vote for the officers." I said, "These are officers. Are you our officers or aren't you?" "Yes." "Then why can't we vote?" I says, "I'll tell you why. Because the officers are afraid (I'm told this quite often) retirees vote, employees don't." He said, "And you're liable to run the organization." I said, "We're not asking. We're not asking to run the organization. We're not asking to run for office. We don't want to run for office. We've had our trip in hell." You know. "But we would like the democratic way of voting for our officers. The president and the vice presidents and the regional, what have you there. That's what we're asking for," I says. But I've been told this many times. Not only by ... not by Danny, he hasn't told me. Well, yeah, more or less he has, too. But others. I says, "Retirees vote." I said, "Who the hell is to blame for that?" I says, "When you go out in the political arena you want us to vote, don't you? You want us to get out there and vote and you come to the retirees and say, 'Get out there and vote' because they vote." But no, in our own democratic union, we don't have the right to vote? Come on. Something is wrong someplace. Definitely. And I said, "I'm going to fight." I says, "You know, I'm getting to that stage where my favorite saying is I don't even buy green bananas anymore." And Danny would laugh and so would the others. But I make that statement quite often, you know. And it's true. I says, "We've accomplished a lot but we've got to get going." But again, I already had

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this speech already made up you know. I says, "Getting back to voting. You call this a democratic union. You call this a democratic union when we've got now 61,000 members in the retiree division that does not have the right to vote? You call that a democracy? You call this a democratic union?" They haven't given me an answer on that.

FV: It's good to have a fight, isn't it? It's what keeps you going.

CP: That's right.

FV: So, you obviously have had a great relationship with CSEA.

CP: Yes, I do.

FV: Tell me what CSEA is to you. What does it mean to you?

CP: CSEA primarily, and I know it and I've told the employees, is a labor union. We know that. We realize that. A union are for those people that are working primarily. And it's to fight for their rights. It's to fight not only for their rights, for their pay, vacation, anything along those lines, you know. The rights. And it's primarily a labor union. That's what it is. But, and there's a big but, since you have a retiree division, you've got a responsibility for the retiree division too. Otherwise, what is that retiree division doing there? You've got the retiree division, private sector division, local government division and the state division. And another thing I've often discussed with Danny, I says, "You know, you talk about justice. Let me give you an example of what I call injustice. Now, so far as voting is concerned, I've got 22 locals. So you give me 22 votes." I said, "Big deal. 22 votes representing 61,000 people. And to make the cheese more binding, supposedly I only can vote on things that are affecting retiree division. What in hell kind of justice is that?" "Now let's turn it around," I says. "Let's go to the employees. They can vote on anything, including the retiree division. Anything that I may bring up, they've got a right to vote on. Why should they have a right to vote on when I don't have a right to vote on any of their issues?" And that's one of the things that disturbs me about the injustice of that. And another thing I said, "Dan, look, I'm a chair of the executive committee, but technically I'm a lot more than that." I'm not blowing myself up, I'm blowing the position up. Technically, this chair is really the president of the retirees of 22 locals. And when they go to a board meeting there's only one person there, the chair of the executive committee of the retiree division representing all these people. And this is another injustice I think we have to correct. I think we're going to work on it. And I says, "But remember, I don't buy green bananas anymore."

FV: Light a little fire under them. Now, think of CSEA as your whole career with CSEA from before you were retired until now. What do you see as the lessons that CSEA's history holds for CSEA's future?

CP: The election? Upcoming or what?

FV: No, no. Just the lessons learned in a union. What is CSEA heading for as a union? I mean, what lessons does the history help...

CP: Lessons? Well, lessons ... one thing that CSEA learned as well as AFSCME, like I said before too, there's a lesson there that you just don't pick out a party and say, "We're going democratic or republican or we're going independent

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or something like that." In the past I think we've learned a lesson there, we know that we lean towards the democratic party, but the lesson I think they're learning and have learned is that you don't lean that way because you lose votes. Because you've got democrats and you've got republicans and you've got others. And you've got to teach the people to vote on the issues. Those are the lessons that's got to be learned. The issues and the individuals. This is what they have to learn. And I think the powers to be, as I said before, is learning that. Don't say democrat, don't say republican, although once in a while we stick that in there. Okay. But don't push it like you used to. And they don't. They've learned that. That's one of the big lessons, because they got beat pretty bad in some of the elections because of that very issue.

FV: Good. Anything else you want to talk about? The old days, the new days?

CP: Well, there's the affiliation.

FV: Yeah, let's talk about that.

CP: There's affiliation with AFSCME. Okay. Don't ask me the dates, I've got all the dates there. We had a four-year trial ... First, CSEA had the affiliation with AFSCME, you know. And then they come after the retiree division. That's something else. The retiree division is the only division that's got a separate affiliation with AFSCME. See, the other divisions are there with CSEA. Well, anyway, I remember Bill McGowan at the time was president. You remember Bill, do you?

FV: I've heard stories about Bill.

CP: Oh yeah, and his ... chomping his cigar.

FV: Yeah, we should talk about him a little.

CP: I remember meeting at The Desmond. There was a vote on whether we should affiliate with AFSCME. And Bill was, as usual, chomping that cigar, you know. And we were talking and I said, "Bill, one of the big reasons, don't tell me differently, that we're joining AFSCME is because if we don't they're going to eat us up." "What makes you say that?" I says, "You know damn well it's true." I says, "Apparently, we don't have a choice. Okay. Well, they joined. And it wasn't too long after that, they come after the retiree division as an independent unit because there is a retiree division in AFSCME. Again, as I said earlier and I think they comprise about over 200,000 anyway. And then they come after us and we've got about, as I keep saying, 61,000. On a trial basis, we had it for four years. And then, as I said, I've got all those dates right in there. But I don't have them up here. And at the end of the affiliation... Well, AFSCME treats, and still to this day, AFSCME treats us real well. Real good. Some people say better than CSEA, but I don't say that.

FV: But pretty good.

CP: But AFSCME is good and we got through the affiliation all right. They gave us all kinds of goodies. And then we became a permanent fixture of AFSCME. And, matter of fact, we hold four seats on the AFSCME council. No other chapter holds that many. All the others hold maybe one or two. Minimum is one, maximum is four. And at the last AFSCME convention I was the only delegate, although we held four seats, I was the only delegate that had the right to vote on the

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floor. But at the last convention it was passed that now we have the same voting rights that we do on the AFSCME council. Like at the AFSCME council I had four votes, not just one. And I was the one able to speak for them all. Now, at the AFSCME convention, at the floor, it was just passed, now I have four votes as well as on the AFSCME council. And it goes according to the membership. And you can look that up too. The membership. One for so many thousand, two for so many thousand, and right now we've got 60,000. Pretty soon if we go any further I don't know if it calls for, I think it calls for more after you get a certain. But right now it's four. And we hold that. And they hold CSEA in high esteem. AFSCME does. Why? Well, two reasons. First, because of our membership in the retiree division. Secondly, because CSEA is one of their biggest affiliates. There's no question about it. I don't know how many hundred delegates we bring to an AFSCME convention. And they meet on a semi-annual, not semi-annual, biannual basis. But we meet every year, The AFSCME council. This year, 2003, instead of a convention of AFSCME, we'll be meeting in Washington. Maybe you'll be there.

FV: I will.

CP: Will you? And we meet in Washington. Our council does not the delegates, but the council. The reason the convention will meet in Washington at the council there. And so, AFSCME has been real good. And I can communicate with Steve who's very good. He's the director. And Karen the assistant director there. Nice people. They're all nice people there. There's Mary, I can't think of her last name. All good people there. And I can communicate with them. I've got a problem, you know, with AFSCME or something, "Hey Steve." And he's right there. And so is Karen. And I like both of them for this reason, they're both good speakers. Both of them. When they make a presentation. I tell, Steve that too. He makes a presentation and he knows what he is talking about ... and Karen is very good too. Very good.

FV: Tell me some stories about Bill McGowan.

CP: About what?

FV: McGowan.

CP: Bill? Well, Bill didn't ... he wasn't too favorable to the retirees. Bill wasn't. I remember one time, we were backing someone for comptroller, another Irishman, and Bill didn't want him but we had him anyway at one of our conventions, you know. And he was madder than heck. "Sorry, Bill, we already invited him." They says, "We aren't going to un-invite him." And Bill had his ways too. But he wasn't too keen on giving the retirees too much. As a matter of fact, I don't recall him giving the retirees anything. Although Bill and I were good friends. But, I don't know. Matter of fact, Bill and I were on the negotiating team together way back for mental hygiene. Yup. And I suppose you could call him a good president too. He was the rough and ready type too, you know. With his cigar and what have you there. But here again, he had his opinions and we had ours.

FV: To me that's what CSEA is about.

CP: Yeah. But you've got to respect each other.

FV: Meeting of minds with respect. Yeah.

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CP: Now, just because they don't agree with you, you still have to respect my opinion. And vice versa. You've got your opinion? Fine. But at least respect mine. And this is what it's all about too. To respect one another. You know. And this is what CSEA. You hear a lot of arguments, maybe on the floor or maybe at a board meeting and sometimes they do get a little hot. But what I've seen as of late though, at least they respect each other and their opinions. I've seen at board meetings, I remember old board meetings, oh, I'd get disgusted at that under Bill McGowan, under Joe McDermott, under Ted Wenzl. Oh, there would be matches, fighting matches practically. Never accomplish anything because they were constantly arguing. But today it's a respectful meeting. And yeah, we still don't agree on a lot of issues. But at least it's respectful. And you've got yours I've got mine and so on and so forth. And Danny here again, I know I'm praising him a little bit, but I'm only telling the truth. He runs a good meeting too. And he recognizes the mics. He recognizes the individual. He knows a lot of them by their first name. That means a lot. And we can have good meetings. I remember way back then I used to get so disgusted I said, "I don't know why I come to these meetings. They're not meetings at all. They're free-for-all." That's when CSEA was still in its infancy. And it's becoming stronger and stronger.

FV: It must be nice to see.

CP: Yeah.

FV: You've got that perspective. You've got that historical perspective. That's good.

CP: And it's the same way with the retiree division. We've come a long ways but you know, you know about that girl is that you come a long ways baby, you know. But we've got a long way to go to too. Because the retiree division is not what it should be as a division of CSEA. And here again I'll go back at the risk of repeating myself is that I don't expect ever them to become an equal of the other divisions because of the contract business and because of those particular rights. But here is another example. Employee benefits. We have none. So many of our people don't know that when you retire you don't take the employee benefits with you. And that is a big, big thing. A big issue. So, again as I said, we've got a long ways to go and we're fighting and it takes a little time. And it all depends on how hard we push, how hard we work. But I keep telling my own people here in my own chapter, "Hey, one of these days I'm just going to pull out." I says, "I keep telling you, we've got to get some young blood in here." And when I say young, I mean comparatively young. And then I said, 'I'm pleading: any blood will do.'

FV: You know you gave me an interesting idea. You said you've known CSEA since its infancy. Now, let's just try this, I don't know if it's going to work or not. If CSEA were a person...If CSEA we're a person, and you knew it from it's infancy, right, when it started, at what stage in life is CSEA now and where is it going? Is it teenager, is it 20s, is it a 30-year-old person, is it a mature person? Where is CSEA on a scale of human existence?

CP: I don't know if I'd classify it as mature. It might be classified as mature, but CSEA has got a long ways to go too, it has.

FV: What has it learned and what has it got to learn? As a person.

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CP: It has to learn a lot more. It has to, when it says we are a democracy, when it says we have justice, when it makes those statements such as that, there is a tremendous amount of room for improvement. Now, for example, in the Robert's Rules of Order. Some of us know Robert's Rules of Order and some of us do not. So far as learning about how a meeting should be run and when to object and when to make a motion and when to say, "This is not correct." Sometimes we hesitate to do it. Now, I noticed a couple of times that the motion was out of order that was made and I could have objected to it, and I should have and I didn't. But I should have, you know. We've got to go along those lines and learn Robert's Rules and know how to use them. Know how to put them to use. Now we've got a good parliamentarian, Eugene, Dr. He runs a pretty good show. Matter of fact, we had a little laughter and he says, "I thought sure you were going to say something." I says, "I almost did." Because we had him at my convention too, the retiree convention, you know. And he's pretty good. He's right there. Anything that comes up, if I've got a question at all, he's right there to give me that ... or he's right there and he writes me a little note this and that and brings it to my attention. He's good. So, getting back to your question, we've got a long, not a long ways to go. We've come a long ways, but we've still got a long ways to go insofar as maturity is concerned, one is how the different locals run their meetings. Robert's Rules, keep stressing that, you know. And when to object and when not to object. We've got to learn. A lot of our people don't even know what Robert's Rules are and how to put them to good use. And insofar as in politics too, we've got to become more democratic in politics. Now again as I say, the president has the final say and supposedly he is supposed to get this information on how the members feel through the regions or through the board or through the meetings. And then he makes a decision. And sometimes we know we don't always back a winner. But for other reasons, you know, we say, "Well, we're going this way because..." would you call it payback time? I don't know. Maybe you'd call it that, you know. Even though I say, "Well, not a winner but we've got to back him or her." Is it the wisest way to go? That remains a big question. Is it the wisest way to go?

FV: Time will tell.

CP: That's right. You'd like to back a winner because the winner then, if you'd like to put it in this manner, is in your corner. But we don't always back a winner and we just do, we back the individual we think is best in our interests. Even though the individual or individuals may not be winners. We've got a lot to learn there too. Do we go that route or don't we? Which way to we take? Do we say, "Hey this guy is the winner, we go with him." Even though we don't agree with his thinking. "This guy's a loser." Something to think about. And something we have to learn too. Which way to go. And another big issue so far as CSEA is concerned, so far as CSEA as a person to a big issue is the dissemination of information and in a timely manner. Timely manner is a key. Don't give me this information a month later when it doesn't do me any good and I can't act or react. Dissemination of information in a timely manner. That is a key, in a timely manner, if it gets to you at all. And then it goes right down to the locals and to the chapters. Dissemination of information to their members. We aren't doing a good job in that manner. We've got to learn there. We've got to mature more there.

FV: Anything else you want to talk about?

CP: No, not at...

FV: We've covered a lot of ground. But you watch, when we go away you're going to start noticing things.

CP: Oh, yes, yes, I will. These guys have got to come back because I've got all these other stories to tell. But if there's anything you can remember now, you can do it now or...No. The only thing is my records, someday we'll go over them. I'm trying... I'm compiling them all in one book. Now, generally I had them in separate folders, I had like here the REC, CSEA pending, tri-care, that's a big issue there. Do you know what tri-care is?

FV: No.

CP: Tri-care is a federal program for veterans, retirees, by the way I am a retired veteran with 24 years service in the, that's something else, yeah, I could have told you that. I stayed out of all military. I was discharged 1946. January 20, 1946 after approximately four years in the war. Served in the Pacific. And when I was discharged, I stayed out of everything for four or five years, five years, I think. One day, it's a good story, I'll tell you that one. One day there was a cavalry troop over here in Geneseo. They used to have the horses there. It was real cavalry. And they come over and said, "Why don't you join the National Guard here, the cavalry unit?" I says, "I don't know." "Come on, we'll put you in charge of a squad and what have you there." And they says, "Now we're mechanized, we don't have the horses anymore." But I remember when they did have the horses. And they became mechanized and I says, "Okay." That was in 1959. So, I went over. Well, I'm giving you military career now, I forgot all about that. So, I went over and I enlisted and they, you know they put me in charge of a squad. They gave me a rating of a staff sergeant. And so I kept going there. We used to go to Fort Drum. It wasn't called a fort. It became a fort.

FV: Camp Drum.

CP: Camp Drum, right. As a matter of fact, before that, when they used to take the horses up there it was called Pine Camp. Yeah. That's when they took the horses up there. Well, anyway, we'd go to Camp Drum there and we'd go there every year for our annual training and next thing you know, I became a platoon sergeant, you know. And the cavalry unit, boy, they had the fire power of a company. Now, in my platoon alone, I had the firepower of, I had three tanks that were M-41 tanks. I had a scout section that consisted of four scout vehicles. I had a rifle section consisting of an APC with a rifle squad and then I had a motor section, a 4.2 motor section. All in one platoon. Now there was a lot of firepower. That's more firepower than a company would have had, you know. So I just spent the time there and I got my time in and I got out, I don't know why, I had a little misunderstanding. I had 19 years service and I got out and joined an artillery unit in Rochester so I could get my 20 in. So I got my 20 in. Got my letter and everything. My 20 year letter. So, here again, I stayed out of everything for five years. Get a call from this federal unit, a reserve unit up in Engineers. And the guy said, "This is Sergeant so-and-so. I'm with the U.S. Army recruiting." I says, "Oh, you want to speak to my son." He says, "No, I want to speak to you." I said, "Well, do you know how old I am?" He says, "Yeah." I said, "Do you know that I've got my 20-year letter?" "Yeah." I says, "You still want to speak to me?" He says, "Yup." So I says, "All right, come on down." So he come on down and he says, "Yup, we want you. We want you as an instructor. We'll give you your old rate. We'll get you an age deferment. And we'll get you in." So they did. They gave me an exam and I got my age deferment and they gave me my old rank. And that's where I was then as a senior instructor. But not only did that. Then we started going to Fort Leonard Wood...

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At Fort Leonard Wood, we taught the army, the regular army, the national guard and the army reserve. What we did do, we'd go right into a company area. I'd take five Smokey the Bear hats with me, drill instructors, five of my men, we'd go right in and we'd take over a whole company and then we'd train them. Well then in addition to that I would go down to Camp Smith for extra training and I'd be a senior instructor down there. And so I'd be building up my points and instead of just two weeks a year in addition to the weekend I would be spending two or three more weeks on active duty down at Camp Smith. So I build up my time that way. And then the first year as senior instructor at Fort Leonard Wood. This sounds like bragging, though, you know.

FV: No, it's just history, it's history.

CP: They gave me best instructor of the division. And I think the way it came about was I was teaching them how to put up a-Bailey bridge and these were army reservists...No, regular army I was teaching. And the first day I was the assistant. Just goes to show you, I was the assistant and the regular army guy was the instructor. So all he knew how to do was swear and cuss and he couldn't get nothing done and pretty soon he had a phone call. I didn't know exactly why, but they pulled him. They said, "You've got a phone call" they got him out of there, you see. Well the next day, I'm in charge and he's my assistant. And so I was surprised, I really was surprised. And so I says, "Okay, I'll tell you what I'm going to do." I said, "You've got 10 Bailey bridges down there." I said, "All I those guys are going to go down there and start building, right?" He says, "Yup." I says, "Not this platoon. I'm going to take them over to the grandstands over there and I'm going to organize them. I'm going to put them into squads and I'm gonna have one squad take care of the sides. When I call the first squad for the sides, I want them to get right in there. You put up the left side, you put up the right. And then the second squad, I want you to put the cross beams on. And the third squad, I want you to put the nuts and bolts on. I had them all organized and they knew what the hell they were doing. And this guy is, he said, "You know, there going to get way ahead of us, they're going to get way ahead of us." I said, "Let them." By the time I got through those boys knew what they were going to do and knew what I expected of them. So we got to the site. First thing I did I says, "Okay, pick up your tools. Pick up your equipment. First squad, side arms in place." So they did. They put left side, right side, cross beam. And it took eight men to pick up that cross beam. And they put that in place and they went right on. And here we're going and going. Push the bridge a little bit further. Build some more. Another section build it. Next thing you know, we're halfway across and others are still getting started! And they were there ...

FV: Organized. Yeah.

CP: Yeah, it was organized. That's the secret of it. And it shouldn't have been a secret. Well, we got clear across the other side and I told this regular army guy, I said, "Okay, as soon as we hit the other side, you jump off and make sure you get the landing post there." He says, "Don't worry, I'll do it." I says, "Okay, make sure you get it done." We're on the other side. I have my platoon stand right in the middle of the bridge and they're looking, looking at all the rest. Nobody, but nobody, some of them were just about halfway across. Some them were still getting started and I told them, I says, "Don't you see what the answer to all of this is?" I says, "You're calling them a bunch of dumb you-know-what and all they had to be was organized and told what to do." And that was it. Oh, and then they didn't want me to disassemble the bridge because

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they're waiting for the general. Have you ever heard of that story? Huh? They're waiting for the general. They want the general to see this. So we're waiting and waiting. Never showed. I said, "The heck with this." I didn't say heck, I I says, "We're going back." So says, "The hell with this." they start disassembling the bridge back. And we were back there and would you believe it, some hadn't even got to the other side yet and we were all done.

FV: Got it up and back.

CP: That's right.

FV: Now, did this help you with CSEA or did CSEA help you with that experience?

CP: Both. It taught me organizing. And that's the way I ...

FV: Well, if that's not a union, I don't know what is ...

CP: Absolutely. Absolutely. And it taught me if you tell people what you want and instruct them in how to do it, we'll get it done. And, of course, follow-up. You've got to follow-up too. Yeah, organizing is the big thing. That's union, isn't it. And it proved right there too. And it was great. And then I spent, well then I became First Sergeant there and then I spent ... well, I stayed there until I was sixty and that's mandatory retirement age so I retired. The first year, here I have been going to Drum all these years and I thought I was all through with Drum. And the officers couldn't go, see. So the captain says, "You take the men up there. I think you know your way up there." I says, "Yeah, a little bit." I didn't have any officers with me at all. I took the whole company up there, you know. Instructors. And took care of it there. It was good, but ... so I ended up with 24 years' of service there and got my retirement there too.

FV: Great.

CP: It was quite an experience but here again, they did work hand in hand in how to run an organization, you know. Things of that nature there. Almost forgot about the military part.

FV: Okay. I can't think of any other questions to ask.