Oral History Cover Sheet

Name: Paul Camp
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Location of Interview: Shepherdstown, WV
Interviewer: Mark Madison

Brief Summary of Interview: Paul Camp, former Chief of Engineering and now (as of 2006) Special Assistant to the Chief of Business Management and Operations, has been involved with the building of the National Conservation Training Center since the very beginning and talks about the history of the project. He discusses traveling around West Virginia looking for sites, the first sight chosen, and finally finding the Hendrix property. He talks about what type of design they would use, where they got their inspiration from, the architectural group used, how many buildings there would be, where traffic would access the site, where people would walk and how far, the physical location of buildings, engineering challenges, and design elements of the buildings along with other features on the property such as the bridge. Paul also discusses what things he would have done differently including the Division of Education offices and the walkway in front Instructional West. He felt that they had a great team working on this project including Rick Lemon and his staff, the engineers, and the architect. This project has spanned over a 17-year period for Paul and he is very proud to have been able to work on it.

Mark: Okay today is November 15, 2006. We're in Shepherdstown, WV and we're doing an oral history with Paul Camp about the history of the National Conservation Training Center, and the interviewer is Mark Madison. Paul thanks for agreeing to do this.

Paul: Glad to be here.

Mark: Just for the oral history, why don't you spell your name and give us your title.

Paul: Paul Camp, CAMP, I'm former Chief of Engineering now Special Assistant to the Chief of Business Management and Operations.

Mark: Okay. And why don't we start at the beginning, how did you first become involved with the NCTC project?

Paul: Mark, my association with this project spans almost 17 years. I was fortunate enough to involved in the project from the very beginning, in fact I recall touring some of the early sites that the Fish and Wildlife Service was considering with Bill Hartwig then the Chief of the Reality Division. And Bill and I scoured the West Virginia area for suitable sites why back in 1989 and 1990, first looking for properties that would be suitable for the Training Center as it was then envisioned. From that very early beginning up until today, I've been associated with this project. As you know we're still putting the final touches on the last phase of work here and that's the construction of a municipal water supply line that will eventually connect the facility to the cooperation of Shepherdstown and, at least as it stands right now, it's the last piece work that remains to be done.

Mark: Where were some of the earlier sites that were purposed and not chosen?

Paul: Some of the, some of the sites were fairly close, five to ten miles away and then actually one site that we ended up purchasing for the Training Center and actually was more than a training center at that time, was, it was envisioned that it would be a training center and also an educational center and a visitor center and much grander than simply a training center. But the Fish and Wildlife Service went and actually purchased a piece of property, several hundred acres along the Shenandoah River, not too far from Harpers Ferry. It was referred to as the quarry site and in fact had a great deal of potential but after we made the purchase it ended up being cost prohibitive to develop that site and turn it into what we wanted to, so eventually the Service disposed of the property, but that was, that was one of our leading contenders and more than our leading contender it was, it was our preferred site at one time. Between Harpers Ferry and Martinsville, we looked at three or four different properties that all had the potential in terms of size and physical characteristics. When the Service came across the Hendrix property, though, I think everybody who was associated with the project fell in love with it. The biggest concern was its remoteness and the distance associated with this site and Dulles Airport is under the, under the understanding that most of our people would be flying in from distant areas. But the advantages of the site, the size, the physical characteristics, the proximity to the Potomac River far outweighed any concerns and I believe it was unanimously accepted as the preferred site and from there we went into negotiations with the Hendrix family and, and here we are.

Mark: What did the site look like when you first saw it? Obviously it's quite different today…

Paul: It is…

Mark: …ten years later.

Paul: …it was beautiful then as it is now, just pristine, undisturbed, you know obviously portions of this site had been pastured and used some, some pieces of the property had been logged but overall it had a very pristine character to it, and very, very little physical

man caused disturbance. It was a site that just immediately lended itself to this kind of adaptive use, and again one of the reasons why everybody, it was almost a no-brainer once people came out here, said that it would be prefect for what we had contemplated at that time.

Mark: Okay once you find the site, what's the next step then?

Paul: Well one of the first things we did after we settled on the site was to assemble a team. And the Division of Engineering at the time, located in Denver, Colorado, had about 60 or 70 employees at the time; engineers, architects, landscape architects, planners, administrative people. We knew that the Division of Engineering would be a key part of the team but we needed other pieces and one of the first things we did was to go out and do, pretty much, a nationwide search for competent, capable, architecture, engineering firms that had experience in this type of design work. We ended up selecting a firm that was in the Washington D.C. area, Keyes Condon Florance, and recruited them and signed them over, obviously this took months to do maybe even up to a year to finally secure their services, but we in fact did acquire their services and brought them in as the key principle design entity for the facility. In addition to that, of course, the NCTC staff, Rick Lemon as the principle point of contact representing the customer, if you will at this point, assembled a team himself to make sure that all of the needs of the Service for this type of facility would be included in the early decision making of the, the project, so that was the first thing we did. Once the team was established then it was pretty much a standard routine type of a process in terms of inventorying the site and, and conducting exhaustive studies on topography, vegetation, wildlife, other physical characteristics, soils and other, other existing features of the site, you know once we had that information the fun really started and we began working on design concepts. It was a fascinating period where anything, any possibility was on the table, nothing was ruled out, a lot of thinking outside the box and whether we wanted one building, one massive building or numerous small buildings, whether we located the buildings up high on the ridge or down low in the wooded bottoms; it was just a very creative energy filled time for all of us that were associated with the project and, and just a very stimulating time in the, in the

process. It didn't take us long in that design process to quickly figure out that we wanted a design that respected the land and respected the character of this site and very early in the design process, Mark, we decided that a large building dominating the site would not work here. And we felt like, especially because of the conservation orientation and the conservation orientation of the cliental that would be visiting and using this site, that we wanted to get people out onto the landscape. And so the way that all started to begin to translate into design elements is numerous smaller buildings spread throughout a common green area with a trail system connecting all those parts and pieces and, you know once we got to that design theme, then it was a matter of laying that concept onto the ground and, you know, we started looking at where buildings might best be located and how far people would walk and where to put cars, for instance, and moving vehicular traffic to the perimeter of the site and allowing people to interact and walk in and amongst the, the paved paths and vegetated areas and allow people the opportunity to decompress in between classes and to move between dining facility and education facility and overnight accommodations and allowing people to have a little outdoor experience in between those activities, daily activities. It was a fascinating time and the one that was just filled with numerous different concepts and ideas and just, just an incredible time in terms of the development of this site.

Mark: Now as you were thinking about the smaller buildings, were you also thinking about the aesthetics of them also or did this come later?

Paul: I think there were a number of things that were happening at the same time and while we were looking at and contemplating the physical location of buildings, we were also beginning to develop a, an architectural theme, if you will. And again a glass and brick kind of downtown architectural theme was, was, I don't think even considered for a moment. We looked at rustic lodge theme, log cabin, national park kind of theme and farm house, I mean I think those were three or four of the initial thematic concepts that we looked at early on and again not too far into the process, we started traveling around the countryside, the local area and were so impressed with the native architectural of some of the farm buildings and barns and so on is, we quickly moved towards that as our

architectural theme. Simple structures, stone, brick, standing seam roofs, rich colors, those were, those were some of the design elements that the team moved to and, and began to explore and refine without, without being too cute and too rustic and so on; you see the way it's been translated onto the site.

Mark: What were some of the greater engineering challenges of this particular site?

Paul: There were, there were several, there may be many but, but clearly the soil type, the Karst topography that we have here was a challenge. We were trying to balance the location of buildings onto the site with cost considerations and trying to avoid a lot of blasting and a lot of earth moving and again to respect the site. I would say that the substrate and the soil types and the close proximity to rock to the surface was a huge challenge in terms of locating buildings and conducting our final engineering designs. Another was the maintaining this whole concept of trying to keep vehicular traffic on the periphery of this site, I mean that required careful location of buildings and trying to find the right balance between having our, our residence walk a certain distance, not too far but far enough to where there would be an opportunity to experience the outdoors in between classes and breaks and things like that. Moving the vehicles to the periphery required a little bit more road surfacing and parking areas that if you had all of the, all of the traffic come into a main multi-story parking garage, for instance, I think that, from a design standpoint, that would have been much easier. This was a little bit more challenging to be delicate but yet still keep the vehicles and pedestrian traffic separated. Those, those were clearly two challenges that, that we had during the design phase of the project. I guess the third was trying to maintain a, a concept that respected our initial concerns with regard to sustainable designs and low costs designs overtime and make that work within our budget. We were very concerned that we did not want to build a facility here that required a major remodel and freshening up and updating 15 or 20 years into it's long life. We designed and used concepts, design concepts and materials and just an overall approach that we felt would maintain this facility over many years, 30 or 40 years without a major freshening up. We chose oak, hardwoods, brick surfacing, split-face block, standing seam metal, and material that did perform well over time and the

evidence is, is pretty evident that we succeeded in that area here 10 years, almost 10 years into, following it's opening. The materials and the surfacing and the performance of the buildings and construction, I think, looks as every bit as good as it did in day one; that was a big challenge to find that right balance. And then again costs, of course you know this, this facility was by far the most costly construction project in the history of the Fish and Wildlife Service but again if you look at its intended use and how its performed over time, I think most people would say it was worth every penny.

Mark: I would but I'm biased. What about a couple other interesting aspects, you already alluded to the parking which strikes a lot of people, they're not use to periphery parking; that's really (unintelligible). Another interesting aspect that people comment on a lot is the bridge connecting the Commons to I-East. How did you guys choose to do something, you could of actually veered a pathway, which we have around…

Paul: We could have and I think, Mark, at one point we were looking for some strong design elements. One is the common, the green area, the forested green area that the dormitories, the Commons, and the instructional buildings are, are centered around. But we were looking for another architectural element that would help unite and define the major core, core area of the facility. And clearly one, one option was to steer people around that ravine and I think during one of our many design charrettes, we felt as though there was an opportunity to really strengthen the connection between the Commons and the rest of the campus and to do so because they're somewhat on a straight line orientation along the ridge was to connect them with the bridge. I think most people feel that was successful in terms of tying those two elements, the Instructional and the Commons, together with the bridge. I don't think a circuitous path that went down into the bottoms and came up the other side would have, would have accomplished the same. Certainly another interesting design element is the auditorium and the reception; I mean we wanted that to be a, have a suburb first impression. We wanted people to be impressed when they opened the double doors to the reception area and kind of be proud and impressed with this home of the Fish and Wildlife Service that we created. Again I think we accomplished when, you know when you first walk into the reception area and see the

commanding view and the impressive size of the foyer and the auditorium, it's, it's something that takes peoples breath away.

Mark: Yeah, it's impressive externally and interiorly.

Paul: Indeed.

Mark: Was the plan always, in the entry building, to have a museum in the center of the (unintelligible)?

Paul: We—at one time, as I recall, the museum did not have as immediate proximity to the reception. I believe at one time we even had the museum in a separate building. And because of the message, messages that are included in the museum we felt over time that it needed to be strongly tied to the reception area and, and the place that virtually everybody comes to when they, they visit the facility for the first time. And so there's no missing the museum and there's no missing the message and the richness of the history and the stories that are told in the museum, it's right there, you just, you can't bypass it. And so that, that ended up being, I think, a good decision to have it as close to the, kind of the center of focus there for the entire facility.

Mark: Another unique design aspect here is the daycare center. I hazard to say the Fish and Wildlife Service probably has not built, or had not built a daycare center previous. So what challenges did that bring?

Paul: I don't think we, I don't think we had and up until we built this one and I don't think we've built any others. You know the biggest, the biggest challenge with, with the daycare facility, as I recall is, is how much, how big, where it should be, how close; there were a lot of decisions that we made that, at least initially, we were not sure of. What was the demand going to be, how many of our visitors, how many of our employees would be using that facility and, you know, we tried to enlist the, the expertise of some of the best, best architects and designers that we could find. And, and I think we came close

to hitting the mark there, but that was, that was a lot of estimating and guess work involved in that facility, again principality because we've never done one of those before and I don't think that's, that's a real exact science.

Mark: We're still working on it.

Paul: We're still working on refining that, aren't we?

Mark: Which we talked about earlier…

Paul: Yes.

Mark: …with Steve. Another design element that, that I recognized from coming from academia, is our classrooms have an extraordinary number of windows compared to any other place I've been or taught in. What was the decision behind that?

Paul: I've, I've, well first of all, I guess, in terms of whether that's the right thing to do or not in a classroom, we probably debated that more than any other design element. And I think again because of the conservation orientation and our mission here, we felt a strong need to connect to the outdoors and we felt a lot of our Fish and Wildlife Service employees would be uncomfortable in classrooms that were windowless. The concern and I guess the design challenge there was how do we close off those openings to the outside when we had audiovisual equipment and other activities going on that required a real focus on the front of the room, for instance. And we accomplished that through some pretty high tech window coverings that, you know, room darkening, easy to use, that type of thing, so we felt as though we had that concern addressed, but I think, I think the, a couple things. Number one, we wanted to make sure, consisted with our exterior design theme, that we had the right look and feel in terms of, of voids and solids, enough windows to make these buildings look light on the land, not too heavy, not too massive. The, from the inside, again, we wanted that connection; we wanted people to be able to not feel claustrophobic and hemmed in. And again, you know recognizing that a lot of

our people are, are in the field most of the day, we wanted, we wanted there to be a comfort level there and a connection with the outdoors.

Mark: Another striking element, speaking of the instructional buildings, is all our offices are hidden. I mean when I first came here it's like where are the offices; they're all on the second floor basically with the main floors devoted to instructions. Who, where did that idea emerge from?

Paul: I believe the, the rational for that was to have instructors in close proximity to the areas and the people that they would be interacting with. It forced our instructors to interact with, with the students at breaks, whether they were teaching the class that a certain group of students were there visiting the center or not, it would cause that interaction to occur on a daily basis. Our instructors don't forget who the students are and don't lose touch with the students because they're simply one floor separated as oppose to being two buildings away, a quarter mile away or whatever. We wanted that connection but yet we didn't want the constant buzz associated with the students using the facility to detract from and distract the teachers from, you know, their preparations and work. So what we, what we ended up doing is, is simply having one floor of separation and still allowing an easy connection and interaction to occur. I guess the other thing that it afforded is, is to have most of the instructors in an area with a lot of light, a lot of windows, a lot of access and opportunity to have the outdoors close by.

Mark: Moving off of the instructional buildings, the lodges are fairly interesting because there's a large commons area and where did that come, you said that you traveled around and got designed elements from, from other structures?

Paul: Yes. The lodges, the lodges were an interesting and kind of fascinating design opportunity. We wanted; we knew that from the standpoint of being economical that we couldn't have two-dozen lodges with few rooms in each lodge. We knew that we had to be somewhere in the, the 40 to 70 units per lodge range in order to be economical in terms of our construction costs. At the same time we didn't want to feel like you're in a

big commercial Hilton Hotel or Marriott or whatever it might be, so we tried to have the lodges flow along the landscape. If you know, if you notice that none of them are all perfectly on one floor, they, they grace the site and the follow the contours of the site; there's a lot of exterior variation in terms of little alcoves and nooks. And, and each one of the sites, each one of lodges has a slightly different orientation, it's simply not a square or rectangular block set onto the site. So while we were working on this size requirement of 40 to 70 units, we tried to make the lodges fit and tried to make them feel smaller and more intimate than what they really are. One of the interesting design features we incorporated is each having a little family room or den or, you know, with a fire place and with a coffee pot and with comfortable chairs and we wanted students and visitors to have the opportunity to network just outside their bedroom door without having to go to the Commons if they didn't feel like going to a larger, less intimate type of arrangement. So that was, that was a fairly major decision and, you know certainly it was one that we considered because there's a pretty good cost associated with building each of those little family rooms or den areas. But as I've traveled to the site here over the last ten years, I see those areas being used a great deal by people having a smaller two or three or four person kind of visit and networking that occurs there, I think, is something that would not necessarily happen in the Commons area. Some of the other associated with the lodges, some of the other kind of interesting design decisions were things like the size of the beds, should we, should we be providing twin size beds, full size, simple things like that were—decisions that took a great deal of labor and effort to make sure we got right and I think even after we built the first lodge or two we revised our thought process and made the beds a little bit longer because one of the concerns that people had is, is hey this bed isn't quite long enough for my 6'6 frame, and so the last two lodges or maybe, I think it was the last two lodges, they've got longer beds. Anyway, same kind of attention, though, to detail in terms of wood wainscoting and durable materials in bathrooms and design features like that. Energy saving light bulbs and toilets and showerheads and things like that, all considerations that we incorporated early on.

Mark: Were there any things in retrospect you would have done differently?

Paul: That's a tough one. Some things we would have done differently.

Mark: Realizing is 20/20 hindsight.

Paul: Yes. Let's see—what might we have done differently? The, the offices in the building immediately adjacent to us here.

Mark: The Division of Education.

Paul: Education. I think, I think those offices are less than perfect in terms of accommodating the needs of the employees using that space. Maybe a little too open, maybe a little too noisy. When you come in and enter that space, I think virtually every visitor that comes in there maybe causes a little bit of distraction and distribution to that space. Isolating the visitors and maybe incorporating more private offices into that space might have, might have been a better decision; that's one. I think some of our paving designs might have been a little better, right in front of the entry, the reception area you notice there's that grasscrete type of surfacing. I noticed today that it looks pretty good but there's been a lot of occasions where it's been muddy and a little bit of worn out; I would have chosen some surfacing materials a little differently for that. There's also another, maybe one of the most visual changes that I would make would be the flagstone surfacing outside of the Instructional West building. It's tough for people to walk on when there's ice or snow, it's hard to shovel snow, it's tough to get a wheelchair across that surface, I think flat surfacing in a number of areas, both vehicular and pedestrian might have, might have been a little different. And then in retrospect, I believe we used a central plant for all of the heating and cooling in the first few dorms and then the second couple dorms we switched to independent units and we did that for a number of reasons; we probably should have done that right from the beginning. The system that we have for those first two dorms is fairly expensive to operate and not terribly flexible in terms of accommodating change over from summer cooling to winter heating. There's a few…

Mark: Yeah.

Paul: …suggestions…

Mark: Were there any things…

Paul: …for next time.

Mark: …that came out of the building of NCTC that was incorporated into other Fish and Wildlife structures?

Paul: I think the, probably the use of sustainable, durable materials is probably; obviously we haven't built anything that compares…

Mark: Right.

Paul: …close at all to what we've done here. But of the whole idea of using sustainable materials, long lasting materials, is something that we have done on other visitor centers and other larger facilities that the Service has constructed since the time this facility was built. I think the way the Fish and Wildlife Service receives funding, appropriated funds, it's easier and safer to build it right the first time as oppose to getting it done, getting it done quickly and maybe, maybe hoping for money in the future to get it done right and to remodel and rebuild some years down the road that just frankly doesn't happen often enough in the Fish and Wildlife Service. And so, you know, this whole concept of getting it right the first time and using materials that will stand the test of time, I think is probably something that, you know we did well here and it's been replicated and modeled in other facilities in the Fish and Wildlife Service in the recent past.

Mark: Is there anything else about the history of designing and building this place you'd like to share?

Paul: Maybe just, just one, one little additional comment and that is, you know, this occurred, this facility occur the home of the Fish and Wildlife Service that we were successful in building here. It occurred because we had a great team and it was a team of engineers and architects and landscape architects with the Division of Engineering. It was a great team that we had here with the staff and under Rick Lemon's direction, that we had a great team of architects; we had a great team of construction managers, from the Corps of Engineers, that helped us during the construction phase of this project. I mean this was truly a fascinating exercise in terms of teams getting along and having a focus and a vision and an agenda and it was a fabulous experience for all us but just an incredible team effort that, I mean I, I haven't experienced and probably will never experience again in my career. And, you know, a lot of the success here goes to all those people who chose to work together and have this vision and support this vision and work tirelessly in my case for almost 18 years on this project. But there were a lot of other people here on site and elsewhere who have now come and gone to other projects and other jobs that gave everything they had over a long period of time to make this a success and what an incredible legacy that we've all left here. And it's not just brick and mortar but it's the, the training and the experience and the camaraderie and the networking that occurs here that is just, you know, something that few of us will ever have an opportunity to ever be involved again. And it's been something that I'm so proud of, to have been a small part of in my career and something that I'll, I'll never forget.

Mark: Well that's a good way to go out. Thank you so much Paul this was a super oral history.

Paul: All right. You're welcome, my pleasure.