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Interview with Gilbert Bush Regarding CCC (FA 81)

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TRANSCRIPT

RECORDING NO.: Tape 24
INTERVIEWER: Kelly Lally
INTERVIEWEE: Gilbert Bush
DATE OF INTERVIEW: 8/7/1987
PLACE OF INTERVIEW: Horse Cave, KY
OTHER PEOPLE PRESENT:
EQUIPMENT USED:
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DESCRIPTION OF CONTENTS:

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KEY: K=Kelly Lally
G=Gilbert Bush

Italics= emphasis
// = overlapping or interrupted speech
[ ] [not part of recording]
Lapsed time represented in left column by minutes and seconds (i.e. 5:50)
? or * = transcript needs to be checked

0:00 K: This is Kelly Lally, and I'm here in Horse Cave, Kentucky, with Mr. Gilbert Bush. Today is August 7th, 1987. When were you born, Mr. Bush?

G: October the 1st, 1917.

K: And where did you grow up?

G: Hart County, near Horse Cave.

K: How many people were in your family?

G: Six children, and a mother and father.

K: Um, where did you fall? What number were you in all those kids?

G: First one.

K: You were the first one.

G: First one, yeah.

K: What were times like for your family during the Depression?

G: Well, it was pretty rough, but you know, we had, our dad owned his own farm back when the banks went closed. If I remember right, I believe that he, the only money he had was thirteen dollars in his pocket. The banks, you know, took all the rest of the money. So it was kinda rough there for two or three years. We didn't have any money. 'Course things weren't too high, but it was still pretty rough. We had our own cows, you know, and horses and chickens and hogs and stuff like that, so we managed to live pretty good, you know. But a lot of people had it awful rough.

1:43 K: How did you hear about the CCC?

G: Well it was in the newspapers, you know. We take the newspaper, and of course Mother, being from Indiana, why, she read the paper daily. She read quite a bit about it. I just decided that I'd just try that. Some of the boys from around here signed up and they went out west. And I thought maybe I'd get to go out west, but I didn't. I wound up over at Mammoth Cave.

K: How did—How did you go about signing up for it? Do you remember?

G: Well uh, I went to Munfordville, but I don't remember what office I used up there. Anyway, I—they signed them up from the county seat. I don't remember what office it was.

K: Did you know of anybody who wasn't accepted for the CCC for any reason?

G: No, no, no.

2:42 K: So what year did you enter the CCC?

G: I believe it was 1939. I believe that's the year that I went in the—I don't remember, except that it was summer, best I remember. I believe I came out in '41, because I came out just before, about six or eight months before I was drafted in the Army.

K: How old were you when you went in?

G: How old would that make me?

OTHER: [whispers:] Twenty-two.

G: Huh?

OTHER: [whispers:] Twenty-two.

G: Yeah, about twenty-one or –two.

K: And which camp were you in?

G: I believe they called it number four, across the river. I think that's it.

3:32 K: Do you remember how you felt when you left home for the CCC?

G: Well, I was pretty lonesome, you know, for a month or two. You know, I missed my family, mom and dad. But you get a bunch of boys over there, you know. They done a lot of—lot of work and a lot of talking and a lot of—You know, we played ball, and there's quite a bit of activity going on. So you didn't have much time, you know, to really get lonesome.

K: Did you have any type of official training before you went in?

G: No, uh-uh. Farming. Good occupation.

K: Did they train you at all up at the cave before you started work? So you'd just go to work.

G: Just went over there, and they assign you to a detail, so you went on that and went to work. Every two—They didn't impel you to stay on one detail. If you'd rather try another detail, why, you could get them to change from one thing to the other. You know, you got something you like better, you know. And that's [unintelligible] in the telephone work. I liked it better.

K: Did you start off in the telephone work and stay with it, or did you begin //

G: No, I was working in the rock quarry, you know, loading rock in the crusher. I didn't like that. That was too rough. So that's the reason why I transferred to the communications .

5:04 K: And what did you do when you worked in the communication project?

G: Uh, well about everything it would take to install a telephone exchange. We cut right of ways, and dug hole, set poles, went to the woods and *cut* the poles and carried them out. Then we had to string wire, you know, and pull it, slacken, tie it in, and test it out, hook it up, install telephones, clear trouble. And then we put in a lot of underground cable, you know, into their exchanges. And put in one underground cable into the old entrance to Mammoth Cave. Back to the Snowball Dining Room. So uh, the main work that I was doing was construction on the outside, you know, putting up the outside cables and wires. So that, uh, pretty slow operation, you know, when you have to do everything. Lot of times, you know, we'd have to cut our right of way through the woods and carry those poles in, and have to do a lot of blasting sometimes to get the holes dug, and the poles in. It'd take quite a while to do those then.

K: How long did you work in the communications?

G: Two years over there.

K: How many men worked with you on this project, do you remember?

G: I suppose that the best I remember, it was probably thirty-five, forty at times. But I think the main crews were somewhere around fifteen, twenty, you know. A lot of times they'd pull in some extra help with the, you know, cutting right of ways. We had to, you know, carry the logs all in the brush, and all that stuff. And you had to, you couldn't burn it, so you had to cut up everything real short you know, scatter it out in the woods where it would rot. So that's—You weren't allowed to start any fires or anything. So that's something else you had to do. If it had been in here, why, people would've piled it up and burned it, or done something to it. You

couldn't burn it over there, so it took a lot of time to work it out. I would say about twenty, twenty-five, regular crew.

K: And were these only from camp number four?

G: Yeah. Number four was the only camp that was doing telephone work or communication work, we were doing for the whole park. So we had a foreman they called Pap Fisher. I don't know what his first name was, but we called him Pap all the time. And he was in charge of communication. So I worked with him.

8:00 K: How far along do you think the communications project was when you had to leave? Did you leave in '41 or –2, did you say?

G: Yeah. Well, we'd got most of the lines up to the observation towers, you know, where they watch for fires. And we got the exchange installed. Most of the phones in around the hotel there. 'Course the main service was serviced out of Park City, you know, the toll service, you know. And the pay station, I believe they had at that time. So we was the first to service the park, you know, in the park.

K: And did you do any work besides the park, so did you do any work in the outlying area, say Brownsville?

G: No, uh-uh. No, no. Just did the park. But see, they had—I forget now how many lookout towers they had. Seems to me like it was three, four, or five. I don't know how many they got now, but they still got them, I suppose. We had to get up, a line to each tower, so a fellow watching for fire, he could call in, see.

K: What do think the hardest part of that job was?

G: The hardest for us was getting the right of ways cleaned off and haul them poles that time. I mean, that was the hard work. The rest of it was work, but not real, you know, real hard work.

9:36 K: How much were you paid for your job?

G: Uh, I believe Dad and Mom got twenty-one dollars, and I know I didn't get very much. Five or six dollars. It was very little. I don't remember. But it was very little. It might've been, we might've got twenty. I don't know. Time you pay, you got your cigarettes and had your hair cut and stuff like that, you didn't have much left. I know that.

K: So besides the rock quarry and the communications, that's—you didn't work in any other project?

G: No, uh-uh. But you know, one spring, when they moved the ferry from the old crossing to the new crossing, at the present crossing, well those rocks on those riverbanks, you know—I don't know whether you've been down there or not—But anyway, you know there's rock laying around there. The far side, we laid those one, I think it was in the spring. Anyway, we hauled them rocks on the far side and laid those. And the colored boys laid the ones on this side. I don't remember how long we worked. It wasn't long, a couple months or something like that. Just before they moved the ferry. I don't—I was down there when they moved the ferry, when

they moved, brought it down the river, but I don't remember, you know, I don't remember what time of year it was. It's bound to have been summertime, because the river's down low. So we worked on that a couple of months.

11:16 K: How much free time did you have, Mr. Bush?

G: Saturday and Sunday, I think, best I remember. We didn't work on Saturday, and didn't work on Sunday.

K: What'd you do with your free time?

G: Go to a show or something, go to town. If you could get somebody to haul you out. Most of the time on Saturday, I think they sent a truck out there, you know, to go to the show. On Saturday. I don't believe—They may have sent one on Sunday, but I don't remember now.

K: Did you ever participate in any of the sports, the organized sports?

G: No, they didn't—They didn't have too many sports. I mean, they had a little team sport amongst themselves, but I mean, to compete, they didn't. I believe they had a baseball team or something, but I didn't play. They didn't have any basketball. If they did, I don't remember it.

K: Did you ever participate in any of the organized education programs?

G: No. I don't remember them having any. They could have, I guess they did.

K: And you all were free at night too, is that right?

G: Yeah, that's true. Five o'clock, I guess, after supper.

K: Any particular things that you did with your time then, or just kinda messed around?

G: Yeah. Go to the PX and eat ice cream. [laughs] Drink pop. Oh, a lot of times, you know, they'd have a checker game or something like that. You know. It seemed to me like they had a pool hall over there, a recreation hall. I know that they had a pool table, and I think a card table, you know, something like that.

13:00 K: So, is there any way that you could describe a typical day in the CCC for you? Or is it different every day? You know, when you got up and had meals and such.

G: Well, we'd get up, 'course, they'd have roll call. Get ready for breakfast, you'd have breakfast, and then, I don't remember whether you had an hour or maybe an hour or something to straighten up your bed. And then the whistle blow, you call out your work detail and go to work. And you'd come in, eat lunch. Sometimes they had brought our lunch out to us, but most of the time, we'd come in and eat. Go back, work 'til, oh I think about four o'clock. By the time you got washed, cleaned up for supper, it was about five, five, or six o'clock. So it wasn't too bad. They were pretty nice, pretty nice outfit. I mean, you know, 'course, you had to work, but it wasn't too bad. Most young people back those days didn't mind a physical labor like they do today. If you'd ask somebody to do what we done today, they wouldn't do it. You know, most

all the young people, you know, they didn't know any better. They raised, that's the way they were raised, 'cause you didn't have anything modern much.

14:18 K: Did the CCC boys ever play pranks on each other?

G: Not too much, no. They didn't like too much horseplaying. They frowned on that, because it caused problems. And they weren't too bad. Not bad at all.

K: What did you think about the military running this? How did it go? Did it run smoothly, do you feel like?

G: What, the Army?

K: Uh-huh. Was it harsh discipline?

G: Well, 'course, I was in during the war, was overseas over two years. I went through two major battles in Europe, and I was in the Rhineland, and also, I went through the Battle of the Bulge over there. And part of it wasn't too bad, but some of it was pretty darn rough. And a lot of times, you know, things happen so fast that you really didn't know really what was going on. I mean, you know, I mean, to really pinpoint certain things. But I know when the Germans overran the line over there in the Battle of the Bulge, why, for a day and night, or a night and day I guess it was, we was mixed up with as many German soldiers as was our soldiers. They was just kinda moving moving for—'Cause they was trying to penetrate as far down in our territory as they could, and we was trying to get back with them, so when we finally got the act together, why, we could kind of stop them, see. So, it's uh, 'course everybody had a different view of it, but it was pretty darn rough over there for quite some time. Then, of course after they cut their supply line, and they couldn't get any more fuel or food, why then their army, they just had to surrender. And uh, they would come into certain locations, those companies under full field and full battle gear. And they'd come in, and just having to—They had all their guns, all their ammunition, everything. But when they surrendered, why, they set up certain areas for them to come in and report in. So they'd come in, you'd have them throw the rifles over here and their helmets over there. If they had motorcycles, why, you'd put them over here. You in trucks, park them over here. And then you'd load the soldiers and send them in the stockade somewhere else, you know. So it might've been different other places, but the place I was at, that was the way you handled them. They would come in a whole battalion, I mean, just right out of combat. I mean with everything. Because they had been ordered to surrender. And that's what they done. And they had a location to come to. So they came in, shed all their stuff, and went on to stockade. So then, it was quite a problem to move that many people. They used trucks and trains. We moved a lot of prisoners on trains. Load a boxcar, throw in so many K-rations, shut the door and lock it. Take them along and unload them at some other point, you know.

17:52 OTHER (MAN): Did your training the in three-Cs prepare you for the Army?

G: No, nothing about being—broke me away from home, I guess, learned how to cooperate with people, you know. It didn't—they didn't teach you anything about fighting or anything, there wasn't anything said about it.

OTHER: [unintelligible]

G: Yeah, well, my training in the CC's, why, when they asked me what I'd been doing, I told them. So they sent me to the signal corps in the Army. So I worked in the signal corps there, but because I was trained in the CC's.

K: So in comparison, aside from the battles, away from the battles, was life in the CCC camp similar to life in the Army camp?

G: Well, pretty much. Far as personnel, I'd say yes. Far as details, yes. About the same procedure on eating and stuff like that. 'Course, we didn't have any guns or equipment or clothes or anything to take care of in the CC, which in the Army, you *did* have, you know. You had a lot of junk you had to take care of.

OTHER (MAN): Did you see Army officers while you were in the three-Cs? Did you see Army officers in the camps? They weren't involved?

G: No, not that I know. I never did see any of them around. 'Course they could, you know, coulda come, but I wouldn't see them anyway. But I didn't see any.

19:18 K: Was there much interaction among the different camps in the CCC? Say, number four and number two?

G: I don't think so, no. I never heard of any. See, when I was in CC's, the colored people, or the black people, they had to stay in their own camp. When I was in the Army, they done likewise. The black people wasn't integrated into our—We had companies of black people.

K: How did the whites feel about the presence of blacks in a camp nearby? Was there any racial tension at all?

G: No, no. No, they got along pretty good. Why, probably, they might've had a fight or two somewhere in town, but we didn't know that. You don't, you don't hear too much about racial stuff when you're around camps like that. Especially in the Army. Because if the going gets tough, you're gonna need all the good buddies you can get, see. Can't afford to—There might be some hot-headed once in a while would pop off, but not often. 'Cause most of the fellows out there, out in the world, why, you learn enough to keep your mouth shut about a lot of stuff.

20:38 K: How did the local residents feel about the CCC being in the area?

G: I never heard any complaint. I never heard any complain about it. 'Cause they were over there in the park, so it didn't bother any of the other people anyway.

K: Was there much interaction at all?

G: No. Not too much. Except the local people come over and visit their boys, you know, their friends and things. But that was the only thing I know of.

K: Did many of the guys date local girls?

G: No, not too many, because it was far—back there, if you were lucky enough to have a car, you could have, but you're walking it quite a ways to walk out. So I didn't bother too much with girls.

K: Did you go home very much to visit?

G: Yeah, quite a bit. I don't know, once or twice a month maybe.

21:33 K: Well how successful do you feel like the CCC was in relieving the effects of the Depression?

G: Well, it helped a lot of young boys, you know, that didn't have any jobs. And in this part of the country, there wasn't any jobs. So it gave you a job, a place to stay and eat. And really and truly, I think it helped a lot, due to the war was following, it got the boys broke away from home, where they didn't mind when they were drafted in the Army like if they just pulled them out of—away from their people, see. So kinda like you're at school. You're broke away from home now. Used to the first year you were down there, you weren't broke away too well.

K: Do you think—Or how do you think the CCC helped the local area economically? Do you think it made much of a difference?

G: I don't think so, no. I don't think it made any difference. 'Course, the boys' father and mother, or their guardian, they got a certain amount of money sent to them each month. So that helped the family some.

22:59 K: Well what do you think the greatest contribution of the CCC was in general? Either to the area, or to the nation, or to your family, or whatever.

G: Well, there was a lot of trades learned, a lot of young men learned trades in the CC that they wouldn't learn, because a lot of them learned to be carpenters, bricklayers, you know. I don't know—stonemasons, I guess, communication people. A lot of them learned to drive trucks, bulldozers, and build roads, and—They got a lot of training in the CC they wouldn't've got otherwise.

K: Did it make a difference in your life in your training?

G: Yeah, yeah. I got a better job out of the Army. And then when I came out of the Army, I hired into the telephone company and worked forty-odd years for them. So it's bound to have helped me.

K: Did you do some similar things for the telephone company that you did while you were in the CCC?

G: Yeah. It—As a whole for the nation, I think they trained a lot of young men that didn't have a chance to learn anything. And then I think as they were drafted into the Army, I think they made better soldiers, because they were more qualified to do a lot of things, they didn't have to train them because they were already trained.

24:38 K: Did you notice any problems in the CCC?

G: No. No, not enough to, you know, complain about.

K: So what did you do when you left?

G: Well I, I knew I was gonna be drafted into the Army, so I wanted to get out and mess around a little while, you know, before I went. So I just left. There wasn't anything—You could just leave anytime you wanted to. So I just left.

K: And then to the Army and to the telephone company?

G: And then the Army, you know, they drafted me. You didn't leave there.

K: No.

G: [chuckles]

K: Um, do you still keep in touch with some of your some people that you met?

G: Well, I see one every once in a while, you know. Talk to them about it. Not a lot, 'cause a lot of the boys were out of state boys.

K: Do you go up, back up to the park ever?

G: Oh I go to Mammoth Cave once in a while, but I haven't been back over there where the camp was since I left. I suppose it just growed up. I guess it did, didn't it?

OTHER (MAN): Yes.

G: I guess they tore the buildings down and set out trees, now they did, wasn't it?

OTHER (MAN): Yes. Do you remember a store over in that area called the Davis store? Goss Davis's store?

G: Yeah, yeah, I remember the store, yeah. We'd stop there sometimes, get smoking tobacco or something like that.

26:22 K: Before we turned on the tape, we were talking a little bit about the recreation, how the—what was it, the Whoopie House? What kind of things did you do there?

G: I didn't do any. I just go watch them sometimes. They'd take a load of us, you know, at night they had a special program or a show or something. They would, it would only seat so many people, so they didn't take them all. They'd take maybe a truckload or two tonight, and then tomorrow night, get them from other camps. So they had shows and things every night, but they couldn't accommodate everyone, so they gave everybody a break to go. So you'd have to wait 'til your turn.

K: What kind of shows did you see there? Do you remember?

G: Oh, they'd have musicals and they would have regular stage acting theatre, live you know. They'd have a lot of people singing, playing musical instruments. They had a variety of different things over there. And it was pretty nice. 'Course the CC boys put it on themselves.

K: Did they?

G: There were some from our camp that played over there, but I don't remember who they were or what they were doing. I think we had some musicians or something, played over there some. But out of three- or four hundred boys, you could get pretty well any kind of talent you want.

K: Yeah.

G: But I liked to watch the black boys play, uh, perform on stage. I'd rather watch black people than white people.

K: Yeah, I hear they're quite performers.

G: To me they're the best. I know they might not be, but I just enjoy watching them. They're more, to me, they're more funny, or comic, comical than a white person is. Have you been out here to this theatre?

K: No I haven't, I've heard a lot about it though, not yet.

G: We went out there the other day and saw that "Flea in your Ear," a story written by a Frenchman, wasn't it? They got some good performers out here. I don't know what they're playing out there now. They change every month.

K: Is there anything else you'd like to tell me about your experience in the CCC?

G: Well, I guess that's about it. I mean, that's about all I can think of. Lot of good boys over there. Lot of good friends.

K: Well I appreciate you taking the time to talk with me.

[CONCLUSION OF INTERVIEW]