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The following is an unrehearsed interview with Mr. Joe Kulesza on his work with the CCC at Mammoth Cave, Kentucky. The interview was conducted by Kelly Lally in Park City, Kentucky on June 9, 1987.

Lally: I guess the easiest place to start is to ask you when you were born.

Kulesza: I was born January 31, 1914. So that doesn't make me a juvenile, does it?

Lally: [laughing] No. Uh, tell me a little bit about your family. Where did you grow up and...?

Kulesza: Well, in Indiana. Just out of Terre Haute, Indiana. I entered the 3C program there. At that time, everybody wanted to get into the program and, uh, a fellow I graduated from high school with, he said, "Let's join." I said, "Okay." But we had to line up and draw numbers and the box had blanks so you were gambling on that. But I hit it lucky. He drew a blank and I had two numbers. I was just aiming to get one, but I had two so I said, "Here take this other one." So we both got a number. So we got on that and a week later we had to get on a train at Terre Haute, and we ended up at Ft. Knox. We were processed there. They gave you all the shots that, uh, you needed. Got us signed up. We had to spend, uh, we spent 21 days at Ft. Knox, and I think it rained 22 days while we were there. I never saw such a rain. But, uh, they had sergeants there...regular Army people, I guess, were the ones who were assigned to the program. And some of our officers, uh, I guess they were Reserve officers or...we had one company commander who was still regular Army. But after the 21 days, we were hoping...course at our age--I think I was 19 then--to be shipped out West. But we didn't. We got shipped to Martinsville, Indiana, which is only about 85 miles from home. But that was still interesting. We got there...most of our work was in state parks, but, uh, there were two camps at that state park; and they figured there wasn't enough work there for two camps. So Mammoth Cave...they had their bid in for four camps, so we were one...we transferred to Mammoth Cave, I think, in 1934. And there was plenty of work there but the enrollees in our camp, they were mostly from Indiana and Ohio. So that's where we started and ended up...started in Martinsville, Indiana and ended up at Mammoth Cave. Later on, I spent a year or two at Ft. Knox again because they developed cadres from different camps, and we were to work with new enrollees coming in at Ft. Knox. But that only lasted about two years, and then they sent me back to Mammoth Cave. But, uh, I got to be a leader which was pretty good because that was a raise in pay from $30 a month to $45 a month. So at Mammoth Cave they had plenty of work to do there, but I got to work in the office so I

didn't have to go out in the field. But the camps were mainly involved in improving the road system because at that time--in 1934 and '35--they just had dirt roads, and narrow ones at that, because all they used was wagons to travel back and forth. But we had portable rock crushers and...they had portable rock crushers on this side, at one of the camps. They just crushed rock and spread it along the road and improved the road to about 20-foot width, so it was like a highway in those days. They developed that. Then our camp was involved in a communications system. We ended up building about 60 miles of telephone lines. They were...we salvaged the chestnut trees. They were killed by the blight and they were our telephone poles. But we had a telephone system all over the park, 60 miles of it. So that kept us busy. Then we had...there's a lot of skill in some of the enrollees. Some of them were brick masons. Some of them were carpenters. Some of them were plumbers. They used them in all that type of work...working on houses that they built. They were involved in building five residences in the circle at Mammoth Cave. And we had one man who especially was skilled as a stonemason. He did the sandstone work on the superintendent's residence and the, uh, flagstone around there. And a couple of the other buildings...the automotive shop and then the one across from the automotive shop used to be a warehouse but they've not used that. They've converted it now into office space for some of the people at the main office. There's not enough room there to take care of them. But that's a good example of the work...that was stone that they gathered from the fireplaces cause there's over 500 houses that had to be razed in the park. Lumber...we salvaged as much of the lumber as we could from the houses and buildings that were razed. But the sandstone, that was used on those two buildings, and they are huge buildings. If you've ever been out to the maintenance area... Some of the sandstone was quarried. We had two...three sandstone quarries. One at No. 2 camp and then we had one going out on Joppy...not Joppy Ridge but, uh, Mammoth Cave Ridge. Then we had one across the river...the best sandstone we were getting was across the river from Dennison Ferry. They were used in other construction. The three-spring pump house...in the wall, that's all sandstone. And the pump house, that was constructed by CCC labor. And, well, we had an incinerator that they constructed, but that incinerator didn't work because they dumped too much wet garbage in there and they finally...they couldn't keep the fire going, so they just abolished that. They finally tore that down. And then they built comfort

stations in the campground and we had two for the picnic area. They adjoined each other but now that's all been razed. We have one comfort station still existing at the old campground; and that is being converted into a museum, I think, for, uh,...caves. Yeah, it's going to be a cave museum there. So that...they did work on the road, as I say, I don't how many miles of road that they...it must have been 100 miles or more...that they worked on because there's four camps. There's a whole lot of work there. But they got shy of work on the No. 3 camp. They finally disbanded that and just filled them in with the other camps.

Lally: So what camp number were you in?

Kulesza: I was in No. 4 camp across the river. And, uh, they did some work there. There was a ranger station there that has, uh...a residence there. Some of that work was done by the CCC boys. They had skilled carpenters but the CCC boys worked for them and, uh, did a lot of that work. And they had some buildings at the No. 4 camp, but they've all been razed now. So, that has ended up as a group campground. So that's, uh, about the... Then on Mammoth Cave Ridge, they built...they were involved in building, I think, four water reservoirs over there. I think they've got six now. But they built two just recently by contract labor. There's a lot of stone work in that and cement work. The three-spring pump house...you ought to go down and see that.

Lally: I saw one of the pump houses. I'm not sure which one it was. It was really nice, there was a big valley next to it.

Kulesza: All right. That's the three-springs pump house.

Lally: Really nice...nice building.

Kulesza: Then they had another one on the other side there. The Bransford Pump House. They built that. Of course, they don't use them now. We're tied on to a water system...water district outside the park. Those springs...the water level is dropping, and they don't rely on those any more. There's three springs and they let that water run back into the cave so it has an effect on the life in the cave.

Lally: So how many years total were you in the CCC?

Kulesza: How many what?

Lally: How many years total were you in the CCC?

Kulesza: Oh, gosh, I think it was about eight years.

Lally: Did you stay until it was finished...until it was disbanded?

Kulesza: Yeah, I did because when it was finished, they finally gave me a job as a warehouseman out there at the maintenance area. So that was my first job. Well, we had...no, we had...before that...I don't know what that title was...they gave us a title about that long. But they put us on as civilian employees, but that didn't last long. Let's see...that lasted about another year. Then at the end of that program, I had to go back...they wanted me to go back in the 3C program. I said, "Okay, I'll go." Well, there's others, too. There was eight of us, I think...or six of us...eight of us, I think, had those jobs didn't last too long. But I...in 1941 I did go to work for the park service as a warehouseman. So, that lasted for me until 1943 when the Army got me...drafted me. So, when I came back, they had a boy in there; but they wanted me to come on as a ranger and I did. I lived across the river then at the ranger station. And that was...that was a good house there. Well, you'd better come along with some of your questions there, Kelly.

Lally: [laughing] Let's go back to when you first got into the CCC. Do you remember how you felt when you first left home for camp?

Kulesza: No, I was kind of anxious to...because of the Depression. That was something terrible. You just couldn't find any work to do. We thought, well, at least we wouldn't have to go hungry, and that was an experience to go hungry. You just had to...we didn't have a big farm...we used to farm some of the river bottoms to get corn. Most of your food just had to come from what you raised in the garden. But this was a new program...it was new. Everybody was a little excited because they said this was a program, uh...Roosevelt was going to send us to war in China. And I didn't get excited about that. I said, "Well, I'll take my chances." So, uh, when we got to camp, it was a good life. We slept in tents...it was all right. Didn't bother me.

Lally: Did you get homesick at all?

Kulesza: No, I didn't get homesick. As I say, it was just 85 miles from home. But some of the boys had a car...we couldn't have a car on the center. So they'd park the car outside the camp and we'd go home once in a while. We'd just kind of pool our cash, what little we had, and pay the gas bill, go back and forth. So I wasn't homesick...disappointed we didn't go out West. But

it was a big help. We sent an allotment to our families and that kept them alive, because I still had two brothers, young brothers. One of them was older than me. But they later joined the camps. They got a lot of experience out of it.

Lally: So you say you went to Ft. Knox before you went...?

Kulesza: We had to go to Ft. Knox to be processed.

Lally: Processed?

Kulesza: Yes, that's where they get your life's history, and sign you up; and you had to take all these daggone shots. They didn't bother me but they made a lot of boys sick. We stayed there at Ft. Knox, I said, 21 days. And we ate Army chow...it's all right. It beat a lot of that welfare stuff they try to give you in the community. But that was usually a sack of beans or potatoes. That's about all they had as far as I can remember. The food was good as the Army. It didn't bother me. I don't have trouble eating.

Lally: Well, describe your first day in camp.

Kulesza: Well, the first day in camp...we had what they call dog-faced sergeants. As I say, it rained and he...that old sergeant lined us up...I don't know, he put me...well, we were in squads...he put me in front. And he was just barking...he was counting and we had to march to his count. And with all that rain, there was a big puddle of water there; and I didn't know what to do. I was the lead squad. I walked around there and, man, he barked at me and got me by the neck and shook me like a dog shaking a rat and he said, "I didn't tell you to detour around that." And I said, "Well, I didn't think I'd have any sense going through that water." He said, "You go until I tell you not to go." So he backed me up and I had to go through that damn water...I mean that darn water, and that was it. So I learned not to argue with the sergeant. And then we spent...our first few days, we had to dig trenches around our tent. Then, to keep us busy while it was still raining, we would have to move the tents back and get them out of the way so we'd fill this trench up to dig a new trench...they moved us. That was it. We were all glad to get away from Ft. Knox and get into the field. So, as I say, when we ended up in the field...that was Martinsville, Indiana...at least we didn't...we had tents there but they were these big hospital tents. I think they would hold about 50 of us in a tent, but there were about 200 of us in camp. So we had four of those tents. We learned...well, at Ft. Knox, though, with all that rain, we

always had some wise guy who said, "Keep your tent ropes tight. Otherwise your tent is going to leak." Well, that was a joke because our tent and a lot of others just collapsed.

Lally: [laughing] Because of all the rain?

Kulesza: You have to loosen the ropes when it rains. So we learned not to listen to some of that advice.

Lally: And so after...how long did you say...did you go to Mammoth Cave after being in Munceford?

Kulesza: Well, at Martinsville...

Lally: ...Martinsville? [*correcting herself*]

Kulesza: I think...we were at Ft. Knox then...I mean at Martinsville...we were there about two years, I guess, because when we came to Mammoth Cave it was late '35, I think, or late summer of '35. But they had wooden barracks then so that was different from the tents.

Lally: More comfortable?

Kulesza: More comfortable, yeah. They...at least they had floors. [soft laughter-Lally] And they had streets. But our company commander at Martinsville, he was sent ahead of time. He was an engineer. From the other camps...they borrowed some of the enrollees there to set up the camps and hired carpenters to build them; and the CC boys helped on that. But they had streets laid off and...just like home. You had a roof over your head instead of a tent.

Lally: So you say that you got paid at first $30 a month...?

Kulesza: $30 a month and then you had to send $25 of that home. Then the government would match it $25, so your family got $50.

Lally: Okay.

Kulesza: And you say, "How could you live on $5?" Well, there wasn't anything to spend it on because they furnished us a meal. They had a...they didn't call it a PX; they called it a canteen. And, uh, even a nickel or dime would go a long way; you could buy a lot of things in the canteen, but that would last you 30 days.

Lally: Did you do any shopping in Cave City or any of the towns around there?

Kulesza: Well, we'd go into Martinsville when we were in Martinsville...the town of Martinsville. There wasn't much shopping there. When we got over here, the only shopping you

did in Cave City was go to the theater there. It cost you a dime, I think, to get in the theater, so that didn't tear that $5 up too bad.

Lally: Whatever else you needed, you could get in camp?

Kulesza: Yeah, I mean your shaving lotion and razor blades and soap and stuff like that we could get at the canteen. But, a treat. Why we'd probably buy treats in Cave City.

Lally: What were your special roles in the CCC camp?

Kulesza: Well, as I said, I worked in the office. I took care of all the records and all the typing for the officers. We had to maintain...well, we had service records like they have in the Army cause everything was patterned on the Army style. We had regular Army cadre people; and then, later on, they were replaced by our own people who got promoted to leaders. I think the Army cadre stayed with us for about a year, and they sent them back to their units.

Lally: Were you ever a leader in the...?

Kulesza: Yes, I got leader salary but my responsibility was in the office. I worked with the officers there. But the whole thing...all the ballyhoo about the 3C camps was that they were going to restore the forests and national parks and all that, and it was a dual purpose because we were also para-military. Roosevelt was trying to build up a cadre of trained enrollees who had some military training and military life so, I guess, before we finally went to war, we had a reservoir of about 2 ½ million CCC enrollees who had some Army training. So when the war broke out, why here come the recruiters. They weren't interested in recruiting anybody except those who had been in the CC program so...and they said, well the reason for that, we don't have a homesickness problem and they know which is their left foot and which is their right foot so we don't have to start out getting a lot of the country people to training because we did have para-military training.

Lally: So you all went first?

Kulesza: We did everything except fire the...fire the, uh, rifle. I didn't mind going. We had a war on. I had several opportunities to get deferred but, I don't know, you feel bad...all your buddies, they're going in service. Some volunteered. I didn't volunteer. I just waited till my number come up and I went. When they called me, I went. That was in May of '43.

Lally: I just want to make sure it hasn't run out. Can you describe a typical day for you then?

Did you have to get up at a certain time?

Kulesza: Yeah, oh yeah, you had to get up at 5 o'clock every morning. And we had reveille at 5:30 and we'd have breakfast about 6. And then we'd get out again and parade. In the evening, we'd parade and march and we had flag ceremonies. Everything that the Army had, we had to do the same thing. That wasn't too bad. Then we...we could get passes to, weekend passes, to different towns that you wanted to go to. I wasn't too excited about that. I'd go into Cave City once in a while. That was it.

Lally: So how much free time did you have?

Kulesza: Well, I think, uh...after 4 o'clock, after the evening ceremonies--the flag and retreat and all that--the evenings were our own. And weekends...I know we had softball fields and baseball fields. We played baseball...competition in the four camps. So, we played competition softball and competition baseball with the other camps.

Lally: And did you take part in a lot of the organized recreation programs? You did?

Kulesza: Well, I was just part of it. I didn't lead any of it. Most of it was organized by the officers. Some of the leaders were responsible for the barracks. They had one assigned to each barracks; we had four barracks there. And you had to see that everybody made the beds up and cleaned the barracks up and then they'd have inspections. We'd have those, I guess, once or twice a month where...still Army style.

Lally: So you spent a lot of your free time making sure everything was straight?

Kulesza: Well, yeah, that didn't hurt us though.

Lally: Did you participate in the education programs at Mammoth Cave?

Kulesza: Uh, we had an education program there but I don't, uh, I don't recall me participating in it because we had some boys who had...who needed help in reading and writing but, there again, some of the other leaders were involved in that. But mostly that was staff people. We had an education advisor and we had a recreation man. They were responsible for planning a lot of that. But they had education classes at night to help these boys that needed help.

Lally: Did you or any of the other guys play pranks on each other?

Kulesza: Well...[laughing softly]...that's natural, I think.

Lally: What kind of pranks did you pull?

Kulesza: Well, of course, they'd short sheet your bed, you know. You know what that is?

Lally: Uh-huh.

Kulesza: They would, uh, they would do that. And...well, I don't know. It's been so long. I know there were a lot of pranks played.

Lally: Did they do anything to some of the new guys coming in?

Kulesza: Like initiating them?

Lally: Yeah.

Kulesza: Uh, oh yeah, they'd take them snipe hunting. They'd get them a gunny sack or grass sack and take them snipe hunting. Get them out in the woods and leave them. They'd tell them to wait there and they'd be back, but they'd never come back so they'd have to find their way....

[End of Side 1]

Lally: This is the second side of the tape of my interview with Mr. Joe Kulesza on the CCC. Where were the various camps situated at Mammoth Cave?

Kulesza: Well, No. 4 was across the river at the little old village Cade, C-A-D-E. And No. 1 camp was on Flint Ridge; that used to be a country club out there. And No. 2 camp was located at...just above the frozen [not clear] entrance to Mammoth Cave. And No. 3 camp was over at Joppy Ridge, close to Joppy Church. That's the four locations.

Lally: Okay. Was there much interaction among the different CCC camps?

Kulesza: Yes, we had competition, as I say, in sports. Then they would have dances. They'd probably rotate them between camps. Later on, from all the material, the lumber they salvaged from these houses they were razing and the barns, they built a gymnasium right...just right below the park headquarters they called the Whoopee House. That's where they had their dances, and that's where we got exposed to the jitterbug. [polite laughter-Lally] Now those colored boys, they were the only ones that could jitterbug; but the white enrollees finally learned that. But they had all their activities...they had basketball there. It was a huge building. But it was put up with chestnut poles and framed with lumber. Had hardwood floors because a lot of these houses they razed had oak lumber, flooring in them. So that lasted, I guess, until the end of the program. They'd have movies down there, too, and singing and dancing. I don't think they had any play-acting. They might have. I don't remember.

Lally: Did they invite the local girls in? Is that what they...?

Kulesza: Oh, yeah, when they'd have dances. Oh Lord, they'd bring them in by busloads.

Lally: Did any of the guys date local girls?

Kulesza: Oh yeah. When they'd go in town, they'd have somebody to date, meet them in town.

Lally: How did the whites feel about the presence of blacks in nearby camps? Was there any racial tension?

Kulesza: No, there was pretty good harmony there, uh, because the No. 1 camp, that was strictly colored. And we didn't have that racial problem. Then, later on, they started with the replacements, vacancies we had in some camps. I know at No. 4 camp we had four blacks shipped in there. But, now, they weren't too happy about it because, well, they had to cross the ferry so...there wasn't any problem. They liked it there. We got along with them pretty good. There wasn't any racial problems.

Lally: Aside from dating the local girls, umm, what kind of relationship did the CCC have with the people in the surrounding area?

Kulesza: Well, you could go out in the country and visit with them. I know I used to do that. Got acquainted with a lot of those people across the river at No. 4 camp. We'd invite them to come and have Sunday dinner with us sometime and they would come to that. And, uh, that's the way you got acquainted with a lot of those people, I did, rather, across the river and they're fine people over there.

Lally: A lot of people were displaced, I know, as the park was being developed. Did that cause any problems with the CCC or was it more the government in general?

Kulesza: No, no, it's just the government. Course they blamed the park service for that, but the park service had nothing to do with it because the, uh, the law of the parks was that the state of Kentucky had to acquire the property and they had a minimum acreage before that could be established as a national park. And, uh, the initial requirement, I think, was for about 70,000 acres and then they dropped it down to 60,000 and they had a hard time meeting that, so they cut it down to 45,000 acres and they met that. So then in July 1945, the area was established as a national park. But the park now has only got about 53,000 acres, so it's a small park; but we were authorized 170,000 acres, but that wasn't all acquired.

Lally: So even though the local residents didn't blame the CCC, was there any trouble at all? I'd heard about some fires possibly...

Kulesza: Well, yes, there was some resentment there because...of course, here again the land buyers, or the ones who acquired the land...and I don't know what they told those people, but if those people had to move from their place of residence and if the park...the park did put some of their employees in some of those houses. There was resentment there. They got so somebody managed to get around to set them on fire some night. I know we went through one period there, we'd be on top of the water tower, we could see them going through the fields with torches and setting the fires. But trying to catch them was almost impossible. And they burned some of the buildings down before they could renovate them for any park employees. But that's a natural feeling, I suppose, if you have to give up your house for a park and then you turn around and put a park employee in there, why...that was only temporary.

Lally: How successful do you think the CCC was in relieving the effects of the Depression?

Kulesza: Well, I think they were very, very successful and I think they were very effective because, uh, with the work that was being done in the area, plus the allotment that was being sent back to their families, uh, there was a lot of money spent. I mean, the families got a $50 allotment. The CC enrollees put up $25 and there was a match by government funds of $25. That gave them $50. Well, $50 in those times would go a long ways. It wouldn't now. It helped out a whole lot and, of course, what they did here in the area, even on the roads, was a big help to these people. They just didn't have any roads. They just had dirt roads.

Lally: Do you think having a CCC in the area helped the local communities economically?

Kulesza: Oh yes, yes, because what little money they had, they'd go in whatever town they go in, they'd spend it. They were afraid it was going out of style, I guess. But they were always broke. [laughter]

Lally: What do you consider to be the greatest contribution of the CCC?

Kulesza: Well, I'd say military. Because they had a reservoir of 2 ½ million boys who had already been involved in a phase of military training. That was a big contribution.

Lally: Were there any problems with the CCC? Anything that didn't quite work the way it was supposed to or...?

Kulesza: No, I don't know of any. Each of them had their own programs and, uh, when the boys came in, they just assigned them to certain squads and whatever they were doing, they'd learn that. And they had opportunity to learn a trade, as I say, carpentry work and stonemason work and cement work and all of that...lot of them. Because they weren't exactly illiterate people in the job...in the CCC because, as I say, when the program started in the Depression, that kept a lot of boys from going on to college. And at least when they came into the program, they got a little better organized and with the allotment that they sent to their family, a lot of them... You could leave the camp if you were going to return to college or go to college. Most of them were high school graduates and a lot of them were just eighth grade graduates; but we had some who needed help in reading and writing and arithmetic. But they had an educational section there that took care of that. They had an educational advisor that would take care of it.

Lally: Was there much of a problem with guys, instead of getting out the regular way, deserting?

Kulesza: Well, yes, we had some desertions, but I don't think it was a great number. I don't recall any around here or anyplace that I've been, even in Martinsville, Indiana. We had some of them, like I say, when they saw that first rattlesnake, they left. Those are city people though. [soft laughter-Lally] That was nothing to the rest of us. I was raised in the country. Although a rattlesnake, that was the first one I ever saw. Where I lived, there wasn't any poisonous snakes. I don't know what happened to them. We just had nonpoisonous snakes.

Lally: So, after the CCC and after your time in the Army, you say you came back to Mammoth Cave as a ranger. How long did you...first in maintenance, did you say, and then as a...?

Kulesza: I was a warehouseman.

Lally: Okay.

Kulesza: I had that job before I went to the Army. I got that in January '41 then in May of '43 the Army got me. So I had the job waiting for me. But I knew those people across the river. They were having a little problem there because one of the rangers there, he got a little irritated because the neighbor's dogs would be in the park chasing the wildlife, and he made a mistake of shooting that dog. Well, Lord, that's...some of those people...that's like shooting a member of the family.

Lally: Yeah.

Kulesza: That created some hard feelings. I knew those people and the superintendent asked me if I would come back and go on as a ranger and I said, "Well, I don't know. I'll give it some thought." He said, "Well, I've got to have an answer real quick." It's like everybody when they get out of the Army, you have 90 days you could just do anything you want without going back to your job. I was going to take advantage of that 90 days, but they said no...after about five weeks they wanted me to come back to work, so I did. I got along pretty good with those people but when I put that uniform on, a lot of those friends of mine wouldn't speak to me for awhile. They finally found that...they considered me a traitor when I put on that uniform because the rangers weren't too well accepted. But they finally got used to it. I told them, I said, "Well, you either have to put up with me or somebody else in uniform." I said, "You and I know how to get along." They said, well, okay, they'd try me out. So I got along with them fine.

Lally: How long did you do that?

Kulesza: Well, let me see, I was a ranger, I guess, from '46 until '56. I moved to the Smokies then. I can go back there any time now...as I say, I came down as a Democrat in a Republican stronghold, and I can still get a meal and bed from them any time I want to come over there. And I go over there and visit with them still. They were good people. I liked them. They were good and friendly.

Lally: Is there anything you'd like to tell me about your experience with the CCC?

Kulesza: Well, Kelly, I don't know. It's been a long time but I think it was a good program. Some people try to compare Job Corp with the CCC, but there's a difference. There's no comparison you can make cause the CCC was an entirely different program. It served the purpose of improving the parks...the state parks, the national parks, plus the big advantage of having experience in para-military training. A lot people, they just don't...even Congress when it talked about reviving the CCC program, they said, "Well we can go back to improving the parks." That wasn't the...I think the main purpose of the CCC was to build up a reservoir of partially trained military enrollees because they didn't have...Roosevelt was president. They had to build up an Army in a short time and they had, as I said, 2 ½ million boys already received some training. That was a big help there.

Lally: Well, thank you.

Kulesza: And, I think, too, when you're in an area...you leave your own environment at home which is entirely different to an area you go too. You've got to get adjusted to that but these people...a lot of things they were doing seemed strange to us; but after we got used to their ways, we could understand that they were living one life while we might have been living another life. So the main thing there was to be friends with them and they'd be friends of ours so I liked that about it. I had a great admiration for those people across the river cause they were raised poor and I was, too. But I think the 3Cs was a big help to me because they kept telling me that, uh, I would have an opportunity to get on as a park employee. That developed and then also the...some of the Reserve people we had as foremen or officers, they were trying to get me in the military reserve. But the only vacancies they had was in the infantry, and that's the last place I wanted to go. But I'd be interested in quartermaster...I mean, they had some general department...or quartermaster. They said well there's always a chance, an opportunity, that if you come in as infantrymen that you could transfer to the division of your choice. I said, "I'm not going to take that chance." So, even after the war they tried to get me to stay in reserve, but I said, "No, I don't need that." I came out as a master sergeant and they said, "Well, you can keep your rank." I said, "That wouldn't bother me because I came in as private, and I'll go back in as a private if I have to." But I didn't want the Reserve because a lot of our boys in the parks went...they joined the Reserve and, by golly, it wasn't a year until they were over in Korea. I didn't want any part of that because I think that and Vietnam was a war we shouldn't have been into. World War II, I could understand that cause the whole world was involved there. No, I enjoyed my life with the CCC program. I thought it was a good program when it started out. I didn't mind that military training. It was good but...you got used to those dog-faced sergeants, as we called them. They were good to us and they kept us alive. We had good meals. I'm the same way about the park service. I spent 36 years with the park service, and I've enjoyed every minute of it. They were good to me. I took advantage of every opportunity they had to get promotions and finally ended up being Superintendent of Mammoth Cave. Well, my first superintendency was at Middlesboro, Cumberland Gap.

Lally: When did you move back to Mammoth Cave?

Kulesza: I came back in February of '71. I stayed until May 31, 1976 and then retired. I figured

36 years was a long time. Let some of the younger people have it. The park service is a good outfit to work for. I still enjoy going out to the park. I don't want to go up there too often cause I know I'd have somebody say, "Well, that guy's back here trying to tell the new superintendent how to run the park." And I don't tell them...they call on me sometime, ask [not clear] I say, "No, that's your park. You make your decisions." As I say, I was happy with my work and I'm happy with my retirement. We're living, not high on the hog, but we're not starving either.

Lally: Well, that's all the questions I have.

Kulesza: Well, I wish I had some material. I told Bob that I got through cleaning the garage out sometime. We have newspapers. Each camp had a newspaper that they printed themselves. They used to mimeograph them and then they got...somebody would run them through a printing press. I got copies of those newspapers, I think, for all the camps. Then there's one thing...I don't think anybody's ever written a history on the CCC program. There are records but I don't think anybody's ever sat down and analyzed those records and come up with a book.

Lally: You mean Kentucky or in general?

Kulesza: In...nationwide.

Lally: There is one book that I read for background information. It's by a guy whose last name is Salmond, and it is a history of the CCC.

Kulesza: What's his name?

Lally: Salmond. S-A-L-M-O-N-D.

Kulesza: I never heard of him. Where is the book?

Lally: It should be in the library. I'm not...

Kulesza: Oh.

Lally: ...sure what year it was written.

Kulesza: I didn't know they had one.

Lally: I'm going to turn this thing off now.

[End of Interview]