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7-19-2012

## Interview with Troy Davis Regarding CCC (FA 81)

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### Recommended Citation

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The following is an unrehearsed interview with Mr. Troy Davis on his work with the CCC at Mammoth Cave, Kentucky. The interview was conducted by Kelly Lalley in Park City, Kentucky on July 14, 1987.

**Lalley:** When were you born Mr. Davis?

**Davis:** Born May the 12th, 1922.

**Lalley:** And if you...how long have you lived in this area?

**Davis:** Uh, practically all my life. I was born here. I lived in Louisville for a little while. I lived in Indianapolis for a little while. Then back here and...I spent just about all...with the exception of the war, during the war...I was gone for three years in the Pacific. [chuckle]

**Lalley:** How many people were in your family when you were growing up?

**Davis:** Uh, my immediate family?

**Lalley:** Uh-huh.

**Davis:** There was six of us. My father and mother, three sisters and myself. No brothers.

**Lalley:** And where did you fall as far as your age? Were you the oldest or...?

**Davis:** I was second. I have a sister that's a couple of years older than I am and, of course, the two younger ones.

**Lalley:** What kind of...how did your family make your living...make the living?

**Davis:** Well, uh, a lot...part of it was farming, part of it...there was about 200 acres of what is now Mammoth Cave National Park that my family owned and really my first recollection was being on that farm, and that's where I spent my childhood days, but my father also worked in the city at public work. He was pretty handy at things like that and, uh, he liked to do that as well as farming so, uh, that's the...that's the beginning of when I first remember.

**Lalley:** What were times like for you and your family during the Depression?

**Davis:** Uh, [chuckle] at that time, at my age, I really didn't worry about anything but, uh, as time went on I realized times were very hard, but, uh, I guess we were pretty fortunate to have reasonably good health and, uh, we farmed and a lot of food came off the farm, not only my family, but the surrounding neighborhood. That's the way they lived mostly and, uh...but times were hard. You didn't go out and look for something to buy. You went out when you had to buy something and, uh, that's about the way it was...that I remember it.

**Lalley:** How did you hear about the CCC?

**Davis:** How did I hear about CCCs? I don't really know how to answer that.

**Lalley:** How did you become acquainted with it?

**Davis:** Well, of course, we knew the government was taking land up for the park and, uh, the word just got around through the country that there would be such a project as the CCCs. And, uh, we really didn't know what to expect except we knew it would be a group of boys and they'd be doing various types of jobs around through the park. So just to say exactly how I heard about it would be a little bit hard to say. Uh, I was only about nine, ten years old at the time and...11, so at that age I didn't really pay much attention anyway.

**Lalley:** How did you become involved with it when you were old enough?

**Davis:** Well, still...at that age or at that time, things were still kind of...kind of bad...there wasn't a lot of money to be made and I was still in school age so I dropped out of school, enrolled and started school in there. And, unfortunately, before I got...really got finished with it, it kind of played out. World War II was coming on pretty good; we weren't in it yet but, uh, I...it was right on us and I guess most people sensed it. A lot of boys already were leaving and joining...volunteering to join the Army, Navy or whatever so, uh, anyway that's really how I got started in it.

**Lalley:** You were telling me earlier that your father was involved...

**Davis:** Yes, he was.

**Lalley:** ...with the CCC.

**Davis:** Uh, since he had been connected with government work such as I said about caretaker for one of the light towers for the old airplanes that carried the mail...that he seemed to kind of stay with it when he quit that, or got out of it, or it was discontinued. I don't really remember.

[cleared throat] The CCs were already underway and he almost transferred from one into the other. Even though he was an enrollee to start with, then he, fortunately, got promoted to a little better job and, uh, so that's...that's the way he got started.

**Lalley:** In this area, how were men selected for the CCC? Did they just have to sign up or...?

**Davis:** No, they, uh...just about any young fellow, especially if they weren't married, and even some that were married, were anxious to get in it because there was no jobs to be had, or very few at least, and, uh, they were...they would go to a lot of trouble to try to enlist or get...of course, enlistment was supposed to be a six-months thing at a time. Maybe that held true for a long time, I don't know, but as time went on, they would reenlist and I have...well, I had a friend that had

three different names that he enlisted...in order to get back in so, uh, funny things like that happened, you know.

**Lalley:** Did you know of anybody who was ever turned down for the CCC?

**Davis:** Not...not really. Unless they were just not eligible due to, uh, well, wealth...more wealthy than some of the other people.

**Lalley:** How old were you when you entered?

**Davis:** I expect I was 17.

**Lalley:** And what year was this?

**Davis:** Oh, I'd say...17...that was about 1940, '41. In other words, it was just about...just a year or maybe less than that, the thing was breaking up. A lot of them had done gone and I just wanted to get in on a part of it and I...it was a little money and a little schooling so...it was about 19 and 40, '39, '40, I guess.

**Lalley:** Which camp were you in Mr. Davis?

**Davis:** No. 2.

**Lalley:** No. 2.

**Davis:** It was...543 was the number of it. 542 I believe it was.

**Lalley:** And where was No. 2 again?

**Davis:** It was located on Highway...you might say on Highway 70, uh, about six miles from Cave City in toward Mammoth Cave. It was slightly off the road; there was a cave entrance there they called the "new entrance." I really don't know why they called it that cause there's other entrances, maybe they just had to have a name for it and maybe it was the newest, I don't know.

**Lalley:** Do you remember how you felt when you left home for the camp?

**Davis:** Oh yeah, I was tickled, I was happy. I was single, of course, and it was exciting and I already knew something about it, I mean, pretty well what to expect and, uh, I enjoyed it. And, uh, part of it...just like any job, you didn't enjoy it too much, but as a rule I enjoyed all of it because I was at the right age to do that.

**Lalley:** You never got homesick, huh?

**Davis:** Nah, oh nah. I was...fortunately, in that respect, I was close to home and, as a matter of fact, I guess my father was still in it, too. He was, like I said, kind of a junior foreman and I saw

him every day and he stayed at home. He traveled to and from the site there.

**Lalley:** And you lived in the camp?

**Davis:** Oh yeah, I did. Umhmmm.

**Lalley:** Did they give you any type of official training before you started work?

**Davis:** Not really. No, they didn't. They, uh...I suppose that they took it for granted or something that you really...you knew something because in there you didn't really have to know a lot but, too, just about everybody in there had a trade or knew something and could do it. If they were educated or uneducated, they knew...they had different skills and they did quite well. They knew how to do it.

**Lalley:** Can you describe to me your first day in camp? Do you remember that?

**Davis:** [laughing] Yes, a little bit. I was...like I said, I was familiar with it. In a way...when I enlisted, I went to this particular camp and, uh, I went into the office and the officers knew me because of my father. So I told them what I was there for and they said, Okay, we'll sign you up. And, uh, I signed the...well, I guess before I signed the necessary papers, we had a doctor which... he didn't seem to have a lot to do and I well remember the examination, the physical. And what it amounted to, he did not use a stethoscope to check my heart. He simply...we were on the outside of the building...he simply put a piece of paper between his ear and my chest and listened and he looked at my eyes. He didn't check them out to see how well I could see. And that was pretty well the examination. [sounds of amusement -- Lalley] Now I don't know why or how I got by with it that easy because within the next few days they was new boys coming through, and that seemed to be the first place they'd come and they'd get their examination, physical, then they were shipped out to other camps, out into other states a lot of them. And that...actually, I was put...I was in there helping...maybe I was taking some of them's weight or maybe I was taking their height or something like that then the...I was given probably a dozen boys...men or boys, whatever...and...to get them to do something, they asked me, says, Take them down behind the camp on the hillside and see that they pick up sticks and pile them up, kind of clean up the wooded area around the camp. So that was about the extent of my first day at the camp.

**Lalley:** They'd already given you a little bit of a leadership position...

**Davis:** Oh, yes, they did. Umhmmm.

**Lalley:** Hmm. Describe how you were paid.

**Davis:** Paid \$30 a month. I got 5, my family got 25.

**Lalley:** How did you spend your \$5?

**Davis:** Oh, [laughing] my \$5? Well, I bought all the gas I could, which was pretty cheap then...

**Lalley:** You had a car?

**Davis:** Long about...well, my dad had a car and I had keys to it. When he wasn't using it and I was away from the camp...when I could get away, why, uh, well, I'd begun to notice the girls and was dating a little bit, you know, [laughing] so that's...part of that, I guess...I guess most of that's where my \$5 went. But I'd manage to get ahold of a little money if I needed it. My dad or some of the family that had more money than I did...I could always borrow a little bit. But, uh, that and...yeah, at that time, I guess I smoked, too. It took a little bit to buy cigarettes, probably a dime a pack, something like that. I had to stretch them out a little bit. [chuckle]

**Lalley:** Did you go to any of the towns: Park City or Cave City or Brownsville for...?

**Davis:** Yeah, oh yeah, we'd...after work hours -- if you didn't have something extra to do or something, schooling or something you wanted to do -- why, we could usually log out...sign out or we'd get on what we called a company truck and go...we were free to go to movies and any town that we wanted to around...or games...basketball games or movies or just anything for some recreation. Of course, we all...when that happened, there had to be about a truckload, which was something like a dump truck with about three or four seats in it, across it, and all the boys could get on it which was maybe 12 or 15 and that was our transportation there and back. And we weren't really allowed or supposed to have an automobile in our name, or really be caught driving it, but, uh, that was a rule that was broken quite often, I can tell you that, because I helped do it. [laughter] And I had friends that did the same thing...I know very well and it wasn't a thing that was really so strict on. But that was the way it was supposed to be.

**Lalley:** Which projects did you work on or what kind of job did you do while you were in the CCC?

**Davis:** Well, let's see...I guess the first job I was really assigned to that had any work to do was the rock masonry and that was sandstone because, uh, some of the buildings down there, such as

the garage and warehouse, things like that, were built out of the sandstone rock. And we had a quarry that had rock that was really suitable for that type of building, and we'd simply blast them out, pry them out and take a...a suitable hammer for that purpose and chip them out reasonably square. And, uh, so they could be used to build a building like that which is real nice; they were real pretty. And I could do about two rocks a day if I worked real hard. From that, uh, well, I got...I got hurt a little bit doing that...got some steel in my arm right there from my hammer. And they took me off of that and, uh, I simply saw that men had water where they went. They gave me a job, which is very...very light duty. Then from that we had a water truck and we used it mostly to take water to projects where cement was being mixed; it even had a sprinkler on the back of it to, uh...at that time, there was mostly gravel roads which were dusty. And we'd maybe sprinkle the roads down to keep the...that was a very, very easy job. Of course, all I had to do was back the truck under a big hose and let it fill up and I'd drive it to where it was going and whoever was there usually took care of the rest of it. So, [laughing] it was kind of fun doing that, you know. Easy.

**Lalley:** Did you have any other jobs? You said you drove a dump truck.

**Davis:** Oh yeah, yeah. After that. Well, boys...you take 200 boys scattered out here and there, it wasn't nothing unusual to get mumps or measles or anything like that maybe that they didn't have in their childhood days. So, uh, it came my turn to get the mumps and I did so, uh, they took us up to Louisville...me...and put me in the hospital up there, said All you got to do is lay down here and when your jaws go down, why you can go back to work. And, uh, since I didn't really know what was happening when I took them, I didn't try to avoid anybody so I strode them out pretty well. [laughter -- Lalley] Even my own family. Even my grandmother that was about 70 years old took them so I was sorry about that but, uh, I really didn't pay any attention to a little ache or pain at that time and look over it and go on. And since my jaw started swelling, I realized it was the mumps so I...I turned it in that I was sick. So they took me by ambulance up there. But pretty soon the whole ward was filled up with guys with the mumps. [laughing slightly] But all we had to do was stay in there and when we came back, why, uh, No. 2, No. 543, was broken up. The boys were all gone; some of our gear was still there. And they had me transferred to No. 4 which is on the north side of Green River. That, I guess, is when I started



driving the dump truck. One of the drivers simply goofed up one day and he lost his truck driving job. That was something that seemed pretty easy to everybody and they wanted to do it so, uh, since I had a license to do it, why, they asked me if I wanted to drive a dump truck and I said, Yeah I'd like to. So, actually, I did that until my last days. That was the end of it after...in other words, the last day I spent...not the last day...well, the last day I worked I had pneumonia and didn't know it and it was probably on a Friday...that Friday afternoon my father came after me, take me home for a visit and I went to bed. Then when...come time...come Monday, I should have gone back to work, I didn't which I was, as a rule, counted AWOL but, uh, they found out about it and they sent the ambulance over to pick me up at home. And, uh, after that, then my father was out of the country working and, uh, somebody needed to be around home with the rest of the family so he requested that I be discharged and...so I could be at home to kind of watch everything while he was gone so, uh, actually, the truck...the dump truck was the last job I did in the CC. [cleared throat]

**Lalley:** Let's see, well, I guess you could pick any of the jobs that you did if you would like and describe a typical day for you. What time you got up and...

**Davis:** Oh yeah, we'd get up, I guess, probably six o'clock. That would give us time to go to the...we called it latrine. Get shaved up, washed, whatever we wanted to do and the barracks we had wasn't equipped with bathrooms or anything. It was a separate building. Then after that, why, we'd go to chow hall and eat and then we'd usually get through with that in time to go back to the barracks for a few minutes. At 8 o'clock we'd assemble out by the ECW building and we were assigned to our jobs, whatever they might be. In my case, like I said, was the dump truck. Then I'd go to the garage and take my dump truck out, have it gassed up and I was ready for the day, for whatever. Could be hauling gravel, it could be hauling telephone poles...they had a lot of telephone poles to be hauled. They didn't have radios like they do nowadays or communications so I did a lot of that, too. And, uh, we would do...usually finish the job up in time to get back to the camp by 4:30 then we'd have time to wash up, take a bath and get ready for chow again. Then we was on our own again, see? [laughter]

**Lalley:** So after your work, then everything was your free time?

**Davis:** As a rule, it was. Now, we had...the park had a terrible fear of fires and we had quite a

few of them in those days and lot of times on weekends...life as a truck driver...you had to maybe use a...had to stay in, wasn't allowed to go out because you was on duty just in case a fire broke out and you had to take a crew of men out to fight the fire. So we had to do that part of the time but, as a rule, at 4:30 when you got back in you was pretty free to do what you wanted to. But...so long as you was back by next morning at roll call.

**Lalley:** What did you do with your free time? Talk a little bit about that.

**Davis:** Oh, well, like I said a while ago, I usually would leave it, leave the thing if I could and if I didn't, we had a recreation hall. We had maybe one or two pool tables and ping pong, books to read and, uh, we called it canteen which you could buy little odds and ends, coke...and sit around and drink a coke for an hour maybe [laughing] and talk with a friend or maybe just sack out on your bunk. Maybe write a letter or two. Things like that...it wasn't too dull because there was usually something to do and, too, each camp just about...I think all four of them...had a baseball diamond. Baseball was pretty big. That was a pretty good game for them. Lot of boys and there were a lot of good players in there. You got say a couple of hundred boys to pick over, why, usually you could find somebody to play ball...box or whatever like that.

**Lalley:** Did you participate in those organized athletic functions?

**Davis:** Uh, yeah, some. I couldn't compete with some of the bigger boys but, oh yeah, I...I did it, you know, whatever was going. And, uh, as a rule, they...you'd find a couple of guitars in the company, somebody could play guitar and sing and, uh, I did a little of that, too. Rest. We had nice big lawns between the barracks, places that we could...in the summertime, we could lay out there and tell big tales [laughter -- Lalley] and pick the guitars or banjos or whatever...and kill time like that.

**Lalley:** To what extent did you participate in the education programs?

**Davis:** Uh, after so long a time there, it just about all played out. I was in history...took history... I don't remember what we called it in there really. I remember what we called it in the educational building. One educational advisor and he pretty well took care of the whole thing. But I took a little part in just about all of it but after so long a time I got more interested in electricity, electronics than anything else which, uh, at that time, was, uh...there wasn't...well, there was a lot of electricity used but radios was about the only thing of any complication. But

like in my case, I liked wiring a building for lights, things like that. And that was about the last thing I did as far as my education because, as I said, at that stage of the game -- I'll put it that way -- the CCs was being phased out. A lot of men were already going to the Army or Navy and, uh, that was about the extent of the education because the educational advisor was even dismissed.

**Lalley:** I'm going to turn the tape over right now before it runs out.

[End of Side 1]

**Lalley:** This is the second side of the tape of my interview with Mr. Troy Davis. Tell me about some of the pranks some of the CCC boys played on each other. I know that there's a lot of them. [laughing]

**Davis:** Oh, [laughter -- Lalley]. The sky would be the limit. Some things that...it'd be hard, really hard to explain but, uh, you could tell a CC boy almost by the way...of course, by the way he was dressed when he was in his work clothes and, uh, we wore...our work clothes were dungarees and, uh, which was fitted with two back pockets and, uh, uh, you wouldn't keep those pockets over a couple of days till somebody would come up behind you and rip them right off. And that was a big joke...or put a cigarette...burn a cigarette in there and it didn't take too long to discover [laughing] that that was there. It would burn a hole in the pocket and maybe cause a little blister or two and, uh, it wasn't nothing unusual to...for some boy to be out...his extra pair of shoes or two would be mailed to the barracks floor. [laughter -- Lalley] Or, uh, of course, we had Army-type bunks...the short sheet deal...or put cornflakes in the bed when they knew they was coming in late at night. Or, uh, well that's some of the...some of the most frequent things that was done...everyday thing...and even fix a guy's bunk where it would fall with him...maybe he'd come in late and that would cause...if a boy come in a little bit loop-legged, why he'd have quite a time getting his bed to where he could get [laughter] in it. Even if it fell down, why he'd probably have to just go ahead and sleep on the floor.

**Lalley:** It's fun when you get that many young guys together.

**Davis:** Oh, there's some of all kinds and what one couldn't think of, why, another one could. I remember one time, uh...this was kind of...this was kind of an ornery thing but, uh, I guess I had weekend duty that time and...not only I did but there's quite a few boys there and one boy that,

uh, didn't have a real good personality, maybe he wasn't liked too good...he was taking a little nap about the middle of the day laying flat on his back so some of them went around picked up all the match sticks they could find...little pieces like that...put them about the middle of his stomach...he had his shirt on, of course, and set...put a pretty good pile of them there and set them afire and went off and left him. And before he could wake up, why, of course, the front of his shirt [chuckling] was burnt...maybe he had a blister...and was nobody around much to see what happened when he woke up so, uh, things like that...there was some pretty ornery things pulled but, uh, one of the most...the thing that happened just about every day was somebody's pocket being ripped off because...they really didn't have to have them cause there wasn't much to carry around anyway and it was, uh, I guess kind of funny. I never did really...I never did really do anything like that, but I wasn't past doing some little ornery something if I could think of something to do like fixing a guy's bunk. But, uh, they could think of a lot of things to do. Nailing a guy's boots to the floor was a pretty [laughter] ornery thing. Took a little time to get them up but, uh...and a funny thing, nobody would ever tell who did it. They'd, uh...somehow they'd usually get around to finding out who did it but, uh, kind of hard to do but, uh, most of the boys when they was together awhile, they usually knew who the prankster was and maybe sometimes he was really accused of something that some of the other guys did. But, uh, it was all in fun and everybody got along with it alright anyway.

**Lalley:** Was there much interaction among the different camps?

**Davis:** Uh, you mean like...?

**Lalley:** No....say No. 2 and No.4 or No. 3...just...did the men in the different camps have much to do with each other?

**Davis:** Oh yeah, they did. As a matter of fact, well, I'll say, Yeah, they worked together. I've known...you know, been on the same detail...work detail and, uh, they, so far as I know, got along good and, uh, it was, oh, it could be almost an every weekend thing that one company would play another company a ball game...basketball, softball or baseball. And, uh, yeah, they had...pretty closely associated a lot of times like that.

**Lalley:** How did the white people in the area feel about the presence of blacks in the camp nearby?

**Davis:** Uh, there wasn't very much said about it, really. There was no problems. Uh, there might...there'd be more problem if...if there was any problems at all, [clanking sound -- clock striking?] it would be more apt to be between the blacks in the company and the white company which I didn't...I never did see any trouble at all really, but I'd heard, you know, I'd hear once in a while of a little friction or little problem like that but really I never did know...the surrounding people around the neighborhood...I never heard any kick at all. They got along very well with it.

**Lalley:** So you said there might have been a little friction between the CCC...?

**Davis:** Yeah, more so than any other thing and that wasn't...to my knowledge...wasn't very much. It was a very little thing...just some little misunderstanding or maybe a little argument or something like that, but there was no serious problem that I ever remember.

**Lalley:** Well, you were a local resident, too, so you can give me a good perspective on this. How did the local residents feel about the CCC being in the area?

**Davis:** Uh, as a rule, it was okay. Naturally, there's a little misunderstandings or a little friction at times because, uh, well, there's always people -- regardless of if the CCs were here or not -- that were a little bit temperamental, I'd say, and, likewise, some of the boys in there. So, uh, could be a little thieving going on, stealing, and, uh, uh, maybe they'd, uh, some of the people would kick on account of some of the boys would get a little too much to drink once in a while. That would probably cause a little trouble and, uh, but, uh, this is the thing I've commented about different times that, uh, I think the CCs furnished a lot of husbands for a lot of local girls in the area, you know. There's a lot of them...even my oldest sister, she married one of them. Now he didn't live too far from here but he was from out of our neighborhood. We didn't know anything about him until he came in and, uh...oh, in my mind I can think of just lots of them that married. And some of the girls would go to their, uh, maybe their state or community and a lot of them would settle around here, like Mr. Kulesza up here...he was from Indiana when he came to the CCs and he married down here and he's, of course, still here. And that was something that happened. Like I said, it furnished a lot of girls dates and eventually husbands. [laughing]

**Lalley:** Somebody told me about, uh, he said he didn't know if it was a rumor or not, certain girls in the area setting fires [laughing] out in the woods so the CCC boys would come out there.

**Davis:** Well, now, I don't...I never did know or witness or really know about things like that, but

that is something that I wouldn't doubt a bit. [laughter -- Lalley] Yeah, they, uh...things like that would happen.

**Lalley:** Uh, if the CCC and local residents generally got along pretty well, how did the local residents feel about the park itself? Um, I know a lot of people were probably displaced.

**Davis:** Uh, that caused more confusion and disturbance and friction or whatever than the CCCs ever did. Of course, the park bought the land up first. But that wasn't too good. That left a bitter taste in a lot of people's mouth, you know. I couldn't say that my family was happy about moving out because it had been their home, the land had been theirs for years and years. You know, probably some of the older ones were born there and great-great-grandfathers owned it so, uh, but, uh...my family really didn't have any problems even though they weren't happy about having to do that particular thing but, uh, it worked out okay. They'd just have to get out and find another farm -- if they wanted to move on a farm -- for sale which, uh, in my case, my grandfather did. Now, my family, my immediate family...we never owned a farm...we usually stayed on...some of the houses...like I said, I think we had something near like 200 acres and, uh, that's a lot of land. A lot of men could farm that, especially when they just had horses and mules to work, see? Took a long time, so, uh...anyway, my grandfather did, uh...not many miles from here. Found another farm but it was a lot smaller than the one he was used to but, uh, he did. He bought it and, uh...actually, visit back into the area again, you know, quite often.

**Lalley:** Was there much tension between the park service and the local residents? I'd also heard some things about...about fires and...

**Davis:** Oh yeah, in the beginning. That was one of those...in the same...in the same period of time...cause there's some people was so bitter and maybe they were mistreated. I wasn't really old enough to realize exactly what was going on and, uh, who was to blame for this or that. But there was a lot of friction and I'd say that, uh, it could have been on both sides. Some of the people that came in here that didn't quite understand the people here...didn't quite understand that they didn't want to move or, uh, the people didn't quite understand the rules and regulations that these people that came here were putting on them. Like, uh, well...there's questions in my mind about different things. But...actually, that was before it was really made a national park cause it wasn't made a national park until 1941, and a lot of this problem happened long before

that. That was when they was in here buying up the...and if you didn't want to sell, why there was the possibility of a condemnation suit to get you out. And some people would...they'd get a notice to move, that they's supposed to vacate their premises at a certain time, and they would not do it. They'd stay on for a while. So it got more and more and, uh, that was a sad thing to both sides to my way of looking at it. I think...I really think that you couldn't put the blame on either one because I think the blame was on both sides.

**Lalley:** When the people moved out, did a lot of them stay in the area...try to stay in the area?

**Davis:** Yeah, a lot of them did. As a matter of fact, the way we are today, we're very close. At that time, just a very few miles away might seem quite a distance. As a matter of fact, where my grandfather bought land and moved to, to me it seemed quite a distance. And he left...he was probably one of the first ones to leave, about 1934...33 or 4. I believe, uh...I believe the CCCs came in here in 1933 and he moved about that time and it was only, uh...if you're familiar with where Rocky Hill is, which is not many miles from here now, but at the time it seemed quite a distance. But, nah, I'd say most of the people did settle at a reasonable distance of the park, around just outside.

**Lalley:** How successful do you feel the CCC was in relieving the effects of the Depression?

**Davis:** I think it was a great thing. It was a real program. It, uh, like I said, I believe...before, the men in there -- even though a lot of them wasn't educated -- they still had a skill at something: at carpentry, at electrical work, at masonry and all those things, soil and moisture work. I had a little something to do with most of it myself and I learned...I learned some things but, uh...that, I think it was one of the best programs that's really ever come about because, like I said, it did furnish some work. It furnished some of the younger men, and even some of the older men, a place to go to work and money was little but still at that time a little money would buy a lot of things compared to this day and time. You could buy a dollar's worth of something with a dollar and really get it, if I might put it just like that and it improved...it improved, like roads. We had no roads through here, through what is now the park, which...that is where the CCCs were located. The roads...most of them were dirt roads...they came with equipment...they made a lot better roads. They did work in the cave to improve that, such as trails...I'm not saying that they rearranged the cave or anything like that cause they didn't, but they improved the trails and

things like that and to me it...well, I'll use myself for an example. It was a thing I kind of enjoyed really. I didn't really know it so much at the time but I had friends in there and everybody realized that the other guy was in there for a purpose. He was either learning...and he *was* learning... he was making a little money, his family was getting some money and the work that went on was...it wasn't bad work...it was good work that they did. Even some of it seemed a little bit useless. I remember one particular detail that a lot of men did. They went out through the woods and every dead tree they'd come to they'd push it over or saw it down. They didn't have a chain saw or power saw, nothing like that. The old, uh, crosscut. And even stumps might be a foot high or two feet, they'd even saw that down which to me that seemed a little bit ridiculous because it was on its way out anyway. But it gave the men something to do and some experience.

**Lalley:** Were there any problems you could see in the CCC either in general of the big program or in the local area at Mammoth Cave?

**Davis:** Uh, no, I don't think so. Not really.

**Lalley:** What did you do when you got out?

**Davis:** What did I do when I got out?

**Lalley:** Umhmmm.

**Davis:** Okay, let's see. What...well, I went to the city and got a job there, uh, in Louisville. I didn't stay there very long, and I have a lot of people in Indianapolis. From there I went to Indianapolis and I got a pretty good job there. Then I really quit that because I felt myself going right in to the military. I knew that was happening because that thing was getting pretty well underway then. So many men were already being drafted and I very well remember...I worked at a place called Bridgeman's Dairy...was a place where they bottled milk, or I believe maybe the cartons had just come out and, uh, I really don't know what my job was. I really happened up on that job accidentally almost, and it seemed like there was a lot of guys looking for work at that time, too. And, uh, I remember one day...like I said earlier, I really didn't have any responsibility, wasn't married or anything. And I got a little bit homesick and I got to thinking one day, Well, I should be home...I'd like to be home and besides the war is going to get me...the military is going to get me, just a matter of time. So one afternoon I told my foreman and my



boss...I don't remember his title but, anyway, I told him, I says, "Well, I think today's my last day." And he wondered why. I said, "Well, I'm a little bit homesick for one thing." And I says, "Some of my relatives are going down in my part of the country on vacation. It would be a good time for me to go with them. So I think I'll call this quits." And, uh, for some reason, I really don't know why he liked me that well but he said, he told me he hated to see me go. I said, "Well, I don't really know what I'm doing here anyway because nobody ever tells me what to do." And he says, "Well, you think you must go home?" I said, "Well, I'd like to." He said, "Just give me a good reason why." I said, "Well, on top of being homesick, I've heard you're going to put me on a job that I really don't want." And I had heard that and I was going to be the first guy at the plant to check the product, the milk product, as it come in. I was to be...I was to test it to see if it was fit for use. I said, "I really don't want that." And he simply said, "Well, I won't do that if you'll stay." I said, "Well, I'm still going home." [laughing] So he says, "Well, being from Kentucky, maybe you'll like old drink once in a while." I said, "I'm from Kentucky but, nah, that don't mean anything to me." He said, "Well, you know, uh, there's not supposed to be any alcohol beverage in this plant but," he says, "I'll tell you, I keep a little up in my office." He said, "If you'll stay, every morning you want to come up there with me, you can have a little drink." [laughter -- Lalley]. I said, "I appreciate it but I don't drink." And...by that time...we were walking and by that time I was almost out of the plant and, uh, he says, "I'll give you 25 more dollars a month on your salary if you'll stay." I said, "Well, so long. I'm going anyway." But I came back home, which at that time, the No. 1 camp had vacated. The Army had hired my dad as a caretaker there, had a lot of equipment there, and they used it. They came from Ft. Knox...they came down and checked out some of the CC equipment and it was my dad's duty to check it out, keep records of it and so on. From that...when I got home, why it wasn't very long till I was called, uh, you know, to the draft board. I got my classification card which is 1A, of course. And...since I was kind of skinny, well, some of the relatives didn't think I'd really have to go to war and, as it happened, as it ended up, I and one uncle was the only ones that had to go. But, uh, they didn't find anything at all wrong with me. So I was home just a very few days after that until I was called. I actually joined the Navy; I was in the Navy in the war. But the CCs were all gone. A lot of fond memories. There's still a lot of men left around, a lot of boys

locally that was in there and we'd get together and talk about it and once in a while I do yet run upon one and spend some time. I don't go around looking for them really but if they happen up, well we have to stop and talk about it for a while.

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

**Davis:** No, not really. I've thought it over quite a bit since you called...since I got the call that you were coming up and, I've really thought more about what a good thing it was. Now, that's not to say that there wasn't problems and...little problems, sometimes maybe a little more of a problem than others, but to me it was a great program and I met a lot of good men...a lot of good boys and men and some of them were...I'd say was highly skilled. Some of them were sent there to teach. You know, we had foremans and things like that that was familiar with every job and believe me they were highly skilled. And some of the enrollees, uh...it was no time till they were just about as skilled and almost that way from the very start. So...and they'd get promotions that way, see.

**Lalley:** Do you feel like you learned some skills that have helped you later on in your life?

**Davis:** Uh, not a whole lot really, uh, compared to what I've learned since then cause...I say that because, like I said before, I felt...I feel now...I didn't then maybe but I realize I was a kid. You take a boy like I was in his teens, why, you didn't take anything too seriously or at least I didn't and a lot of the guys I was with didn't seem to so, uh, but, yeah, I learned to get along with people. You know, with bunches of boys which came in handy later and, uh, well, rock masonry, of course, I did learn that but I wasn't in the carpenter business long enough. And, like I said, the electrical part of it I learned. And...yeah, I could say I learned quite a bit from it but, uh, it came in pretty handy in later years. But, to me it was...to me, after I think about it, it was a fun thing and I think about it more seriously, like I said, it was a real good thing and it did furnish a lot of jobs for a lot of people that needed them. And I can realize that really more now than I could at the time.

**Lalley:** Well, I guess I'll turn this off now then. Thank you so much.

[End of Interview]

