

7-26-1987

Interview with Vernon Wells Regarding CCC (FA 81)

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TRANSCRIPT

RECORDING NO.: Tape 16

INTERVIEWER: Kelly Lally

INTERVIEWEE: Vernon Wells

DATE OF INTERVIEW: 7/26/1987

PLACE OF INTERVIEW: Erlanger, KY

OTHER PEOPLE PRESENT:

EQUIPMENT USED:

AMOUNT OF RECORDING (TAPE/MINIDISK) USED: 60:03

DESCRIPTION OF CONTENTS:

TRANSCRIBED BY: Christie Burns **DATE:** July, 2007

Transcribed with the support of a Transcription Grant from the Oral History Commission of the Kentucky Historical Society.

KEY: K=Kelly Lally
V=Vernon Wells

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 Erlanger, Kentucky, with Mr. Vernon Wells. Today is July the 26th, 1987. When were you born, Mr. Wells?

V: I was born December the 20th, 1914.

K: And where did you grow up?

V: I was born in Ashland, Kentucky, and was raised in Ashland, Kentucky. I was out there 'til I was eighteen years old. Then I'd been out of high school one year. That was during the Depression times. I graduated from high school in 1932, and then in April of 1933, I was a camp enrollee in the Civilian Conservation Corps.

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

V: Well my dad was a railroader. He worked for the C&O Railroad. But he had very little seniority. I was the oldest of eight children, and there were six of us living at the time. So Dad got very little work on the railroad. At that time, the union rule was that the man with the seniority got to do the work first. And they chose to work all the time, and the younger men, who had less seniority, got to work very little. So it was very hard times for Dad and Mother and the family, the six of us. So it was a time of great despair and great hardship. Not only for our family, but many many families. Because at that time, the unemployment rate was about twenty-

five percent. And most of the twenty-five percent represented the heads of family. And the only wage earner, or the only breadwinner in the family. So there were great hardship during the Depression. So when the—of course after high school, it was impossible for me to find a job of any kind. And uh, so after a year, I scouted around looking for work. I worked for a few weeks at a sweatshop where they made work shirts. And it was truly a sweatshop, because the people who worked there were paid by piecework, and they just barely existed. Working ten hour days. So uh, I had no regular employment until the day of the Civilian Conservation Corps.

2:58 K: How did you hear about the Civilian Conservation Corps?

V: Well of course, it came out in the newspaper, that shortly after Franklin Roosevelt was elected, that this idea was to be put into action, that is that the high unemployment rate among the young people, the youth of the country, was to be addressed by this program that was to be called the Civilian Conservation Corps. It came out in the papers. And then there was an announcement that they would be taking applications from young men at the time, to enroll in this Civilian Conservation Corps. So I was one of them that enrolled in Ashland. And they were only going to take a certain number from Ashland. Then they were going to have a number, of course, come down from the other counties in Eastern Kentucky. And we were all to be assembled there in Ashland and leave from there for Fort Knox. Well, we, I was one of those that was selected. Of course, there were several hundred that applied to be enrolled, but I was one of those chosen, because I think they took them, as far as I can remember, first-come, first-serve. And we left Ashland on about the 28th of April, 1933, by train for Fort Knox. Went down by way of Louisville, and they picked up boys at towns along the way. Quite a number of them from Louisville joined. And by the time we got to Fort Knox, there was a long train. And we got there about, oh, six o'clock in the evening, and we hadn't had anything to eat since breakfast, so uh, the first thing they did was to de-louse all of us. And uh, they marched us across from our depot to some tents that had been set up. They were walled off with canvas, but no top, of course. And inside were some showerheads, and uh, so all of us had to strip off and walk under those showerheads, which were, I guess contained de-lousing compounds of some kind. And then from there, why, we went over to a building where they issued us some clothing. And by that time it was dark, but we stumbled across a field and filled a tick with straw for a great big pile of straw that was in the field, and then we went to a tent city that had been set up. Six men to a tent. And all the equipment that had been set up there, and all the equipment that was used, and all the clothing that was issued to us was surplus from World War I. All wool clothing, and all the uniform equipment that they issued to us was from World War I. And the tents had been out of use—Well, I guess many of them had never been used. So they just leaked terribly. 'Course tents back then were not as good as they are today. And so, when it rained, why, we just got about as wet inside as we would outside. But we stayed at Fort Knox, and everyday they had us out, and gave us a post-order drill.

6:51 V: I think we went down to Mammoth Cave, we went by train down there, and got to Cave City about the 22nd day of May

K: How long were you at Fort Knox?

V: We were there from the 28th of April 'til the 22nd day of May. And of course during this time, they gave us inoculations, and vaccines and so forth. They kept us pretty busy with post-order drills and things of that sort. What they were trying to do, of course, was locate the—or have places for these boys to go. Of course they scattered them out from Fort Knox. Send one

down to Harlan County, and—But I just happened to be in the contingent that went to Mammoth Cave. Well, we got down to Cave City, and they hauled us out in private cars and taxi cabs out into the, what's now the Mammoth Cave National Park. It was a proposed park at the time. And we finally got to Flint Ridge, in the park. And at the site of the old long abandoned Bluegrass Country Club. This Bluegrass Country Club was a project that had been promoted and developed by the L&N Railroad Company, but it had not been successful, and it had been abandoned several years before. But some of the old buildings were still there, mostly log buildings. So, but they were in very bad condition. So we had to live in tents. We pitched tents in fields there, and we lived in tents for, oh, several weeks until these buildings, some of them were restored to the point where we could use them. And then we used some of the buildings for barracks and others for a mess hall, and for other purposes. And then the—We were busy, of course, getting up, getting settled there, for several days. But finally, we were established enough so that work projects could commence.

K: First, which camp was this again? Which number?

V: This was number 510, company number 510 of the Civilian Conservation Corps. As I recall, it was about the first camp, such camp, that was established in Kentucky.

K: Was it camp number—Did it have a number? I know some of them had company numbers and camp numbers, one, two, three, or four.

V: Well we called it the number one camp, but officially, company number 510.

K: Okay.

9:40 K: There was an organization that was in charge of the work projects. They're called the Emergency Conservation Works, ECW. And they were in charge of the enrollees, in getting the work projects completed, but the life at the camps were all controlled by the Army. The staff there was all Army personnel, and we were under Army discipline, and uh, the officers, of course, controlled the life within the camp entirely. The Army provided medical care, and discipline and so forth, was all under the direction of the Army. But life outside the camp, of course, on the work projects was controlled by the people who worked for the Emergency Conservation Works, the ECW. This was of course another organization that was started during the Depression years, and it, the object, of course, was to do worthwhile work in the national parks and forests, and other places where such work was needed. So there was a general superintendent of the ECW who had an office at Mammoth Cave in a building that was later expanded and became park headquarters. And was park headquarters for several years. He had a staff of clerical personnel, support personnel. He had a staff of engineers. There were other technicians, such as, oh, there was a couple of foresters at the time, there was a geologist, and as I remember, there were a couple of landscape architects, a naturalist later. And each one of the camps had its own individual superintendent, and there was some foremen, a contingent of foremen who were assigned to the camp. There was a blacksmith's shop, I believe at each one of the camps. There was a mechanic, and maybe more than one at each camp. But anyway, they were the ones that had to keep the equipment and the vehicles operating. But the enrollees then were sent out on the various work projects in the park. But after we had been there probably two or three weeks, uh, the park service representative who was there, by the name of Robert Holland, came over to number one camp to get a couple of enrollees to help him in his work. So I was fortunate enough to be selected to help him. A little later, another enrollee by the name of

Joseph Ridge from Louisville was selected, and the two of us work for Mr. Holland for the next several years. So I didn't—From that point on, I didn't go out on any of the work projects. My work was entirely with Mr. Holland and under his supervision and direction. Now he was sent down there to represent the National Park Service, and his assignment was to expedite in every way possible the establishment of the park. It had been in the making for, oh, a long time, years and years. And about half of the land within the boundary had been purchased. The Mammoth Cave, at the old Mammoth Cave, and the new entrance to Mammoth Cave had been purchased. But it was a long, long way from becoming a national park, because the park service had certain rules, of course, for the establishment of a park there. Much work had to be done before that could happen. Anything else?

14:24 K: So what exact work did you do for Mr. Holland?

V: Well, my period of enrollment in the Civilian Conservation Corps covered from April 28th, 1933, until June 30th, 1934. And during that time, Joe and I were given the assignment of becoming acquainted with the land within the boundary to determine what part of the park had been purchased, what land had been purchased. And who lived on the land. It seemed that when the land had been purchased, the people had been promised that they could remain there just as long as they wanted to. And so, Mr. Holland had to determine first of all, who lived on the park land, whether they were tenants, or whether they were original owners that lived on the land. And sometimes there would be two or three families that lived on the same tract of land. So Joe and I spent our time going about over the park, becoming acquainted with the geography of the area, and uh, getting acquainted with the people. At that time, there were some six hundred families lived within the boundary. So we listed every home in the park. And that was no easy task, because at that time, the only paved road in the park was the blacktop road from Cave City to the Mammoth Cave Hotel, and there was a gravel road that went from Mammoth Cave over to Great Ice Cave and to Crystal Cave. But all the other roads in the park were dirt roads. And they, most of the time, were just mud roads. They absolutely were impassable for any kind of vehicle. And people got about on horseback or on foot. So Joe and I, we hiked many hundreds of miles, many hundreds of miles over the park, on foot patrols. We also had horses that we used to get about on. But these roads just absolutely turned into seas of mud, especially in the wintertime, just freezing and thawing just made them impassable to get over. 'Course the first priority of the four camps was to get these roads improved. They began to gravel the roads. That is with graders, they graded the roads, they ditched the roads, and they had rock crushers, and they began to gravel the roads. So gradually, the main roads became passable for vehicles. But at that time, there was just no way to get about most of the time. When it rained, the roads were just slippery and it was impossible to drive over them. And in the wintertime, well, you either walked or you rode a horse to get about. So we rode the long long hours on horseback. Many many miles every day. And uh, long hours on foot. But we did learn the geography. We became acquainted with the people, we made reports every day. We always worked at least six days a week, and sometimes seven. We made daily reports to Mr. Holland of what we had found out, the names of the people who resided on the park land, and we had maps that we filled with information locating the land that had already been bought. So uh, that was our primary activity during the period from oh, about the latter part of May until the end of June, 1934. So our tour of duty—'Course at that time, an enrollee was only allowed to remain in one of the camps for, as I recall, fourteen months. So our period expired at the end of June of '34.

18:55 V: And then we were both hired as park rangers by the Kentucky National Park Commission. And uh, then we moved to the Mammoth Cave Hotel. And we lived there at the hotel, and we

worked directly with Mr. Holland from that time on as park rangers. So then the real jobs for Joe and me, and for Mr. Holland, again, and that was to get the people off the park land. The park service is never going to make a national park there as long as hundreds of people lived on the land. It had to be vacated, and of course, had to revert to a primitive state before the park service would even consider assuming jurisdiction for any purpose. So that became our primary job for the next year or so. The people who bought the land for the Kentucky National Park Commission, and I understand, the land had been bought slowly, a little at a time as funds were available over, oh, a long period of time, years. Some of the money that was used was by public subscription. I remember when I was a child in school. There'd be campaigns to raise money for a national park at Mammoth Cave. And so some of the money was derived from that for that purpose. And of course, the state would appropriate money from time to time to buy some of the land, and the profits of Mammoth Cave itself, after they, once they acquired ownership, were used for that purpose. So about thirty thousand acres had been bought of the some sixty thousand acres within the boundary. These land buyers, because they were absolutely ignorant of what a national park was like, or maybe because they were directed to do so—we never did really find out why—they misled these people into believing that if they sold out, that they would be required to move. At least they wouldn't be required to move for years and years, probably during their lifetime. And they entered into what those people called "gentlemen's agreements." And we heard that term used time and time and time again, gentlemen's agreements were these former owners that if they sell, then they can remain there during their lifetime. Now these were only verbal agreements. There's never anything like that put in writing. But these people believed that these agreements were valid. So that was a cause of a tremendous hostility that later developed. Because they had thought they had been betrayed when they found out that they were gonna have to vacate the land. And they continued to use those farms within the boundary, just as they had when they owned them. That is, they cut down timber for firewood, and rail fences. They used the pasture land—Well, they just used it just as they had when they had owned the land. And they believed that it was perfectly alright for them to do so. Now these two land buyers were local citizens down there. One was by the name of Alan DeMumrin [?], he was a former state senator. He owned a general store there at Mammoth Cave. He also owned the telephone system, which operated in Edmonson County. And he was also a landowner within the park boundary, and had sold it out, and his family still lived on it at the time. The other man was a man name of Gillis Vincent who lived in Brownsville, and he was the father of Beverly Vincent who had been an attorney general of Kentucky. And Gillis Vincent had also owned a farm within the park, and he'd sold that to the Kentucky National Park Commission, and he lived on it for a while. And after he had moved off of it into Brownsville, he put a tenant on it, on the land, and continued to control it and use it, just like he had when he had owned it. But the local officials there were not going to help us. We knew that. In fact, during that year when we were enrollees, we had some vandalism, which we had tried to get prosecuted in Brownsville, but we never were successful at all. And so, we knew that we're not going to get any help in getting these people to move. So uh, Mr. Holland, though, was down there for a purpose, and he was a determined man. He was a pusher. And he had been sent there to expedite getting the park established, and he was gonna do it outside the law, if he had to. And that's what we had to do, outside the law.

24:05 V: Now these people we knew too, would not blame these land buyers, they were local citizens. So they would not blame them. Because they would feel that those land buyers had in good faith told them these, that they could remain on the land. But they would blame us, because we were all three outsiders, we were strangers, we were not natives in the area. So we would get the blame for all that had happened. Well, Mr. Holland told us to get the word out. This is early,

well, shortly after in July of '34, to get the word out among the population within the boundary, who lived on park land, that they were gonna have to move. And we did. Joe and I spread the word around that the park service is not going to accept it for a national park down there, and it's never gonna become a national park until they all moved off. But nobody moved. They didn't think they had to, and they didn't think we had any authority to move them. So shortly after that, I would say probably in August of '34, I was on foot patrol at the mouth of Buffalo, and I happened upon a man the name of Richards, who was removing some property from a building owned by the park. I questioned this man, Richards, and he told me that he was a tenant on park land and lived in that particular area. He admitted that he had no right to take this material. It was a house that had been vacated at that point, and he had removed some of the metal roofing from this house, and had loaded onto a wagon. He endeavored to make his escape. I was on one side of Buffalo Creek, and he was on the other, and I had to go way up the creek to cross, and I had several miles to go to catch up with him, as he drove his team away from the site. But I finally caught him, and he told me who he was and what he had done, and admitted that he had no right to do this. He was just a tenant on park land. So I reported this incident to Mr. Holland, and he said, "Well, we will make an example of him." He'll be the first man to have to move forcibly if he doesn't move voluntarily. So Mr. Holland prepared a twenty-day letter to this man named Richards, and Joe and I delivered it to him, and he just bluntly told us that he was not going to move. He said, "You can't force me off, I'm not going to move. I'll be here at the end of twenty days, so you're just wasting your time." Well, at the end of twenty days, he was still there. Mr. Holland buckled on his GI-45, Joe and I loaded down with axes and crowbars and sledgehammers. We set out for this man's place. They were still there. Mr. Holland gave them a few minutes to move their belongings out of the house, but they wouldn't do it. So Joe and Mr. Holland boosted me up on the roof of this building. It was mostly a log house with a boxed addition. And Mr. Holland told me to take the roof off. So I began with crowbars and axes to knock the roof off. It was a roof that was mostly wooden shingles and some galvanized metal sheets on the roof too. So in a couple of hours I had the roof just about off. In the meantime, Joe and Mr. Holland with sledgehammers, and knocked down the wooden additions that had been added to this log building. In about two hours, why, we had just about, well, we'd made the house impossible to live in. It was demolished to the point where nobody could live in it. 'Course these people, when they saw that we were actually going to knock the house down, why, they began to move their belongings out into the yard. Now this is the first time that we had to actually force somebody off the park. It was a difficult, hard thing to do. A terrible—well, it was considered to be a very terrible that we had done. But to have gone through court, try to get an eviction through the local courts would've been an impossibility. It would've been—If we had used the legal steps that we probably should have, it would've taken years before Mammoth Cave would've become a national park. But this very effectively moved this man off the park. And of course, the news of this incident got around fast. It spread like wildfire. There were lots of threats against us. One man sent in word by somebody that he lived on park land, he was a tenant on park land, and he was not going to move, and if anybody climbed on his roof, they'd be shot off his roof.

K: Let me stop for just a second.

V: Okay.

28:57 K: This is the second side of the tape of my interview with Mr. Vernon Wells. Okay, you were telling me about somebody who was threatening you all about—

V: Yes, this man who sent in word that he would not move, and if anybody climbed on his roof, he'd shoot them off the roof. He was the next one to get the twenty-day letter. Well, at the end of twenty days, the three of us went to the place, and we breathed a lot easier when we found out that he hadn't waited for the twenty days to expire, but had moved before the expiration date. So uh, Mr. Holland then began to prepare these twenty-day letters. Very selectively, a few at a time, first picking the tenants, that is, people who had not owned any land within the park, but who had resided in the park in some of the homes. They had been tenant farmers before the land had been sold, so they just had remained in the houses. So we delivered these, Joe and I delivered these twenty-day letters to these people. And then we visited them every day. Every day during those twenty days. And it became obvious to them, very quickly, that if they didn't move, we were gonna force them to move. And so there began to be a gradual move of the people out of the park. One old fellow I recall, he lived on Flint Ridge. He was, as I remember, a widower, at least he lived alone at his home there. And he said that he was never gonna ever gonna move. And if anybody tried to move him off, there'd be a gun battle. So we found out, though, that he had a daughter who lived up in Horse Cave, and she'd been for some time trying to get him to move. He was pretty well up in years. And uh, to come and live with her. But he refused to do it. He said he was gonna stay there. So we conspired with his daughter to take him to her home for a visit one day, and while he was gone, why we took a crew of three-C boys, the number one camp, and a bulldozer over there, and we demolished that house, so when he came back, there was not anything there but a pile of lumber on the ground. Of course, he was very irate about the thing, and I'm sure he would've tried to kill us if we'd been around, but we very piously stayed away. And then Mr. Holland turned his attention to one of the former owners. We had so far just dealt with people who were just tenants, not landowners, not former landowners, rather. So we picked a man who had owned a farm at Houchins Ferry, on the south side of the river. His name was Elgar Parsley. And Parsley had moved his family into a home in Brownsville, but intended to retain possession of this park land by putting a tenant in his farm home there. Well we intended that this would not take place. We were getting this information from, we had a few people who were cooperating with us. The ferryman at Houchins Ferry, his name was W.O. Blanton, Oscar Blanton. Everybody called him "Oph" O-P-H, Oph Blanton. And he became our friend, and we got information from him that Parsley intended to move this tenant into this property and retain possession that way. We knew that Parsley always went to Brownsville on [doorbell rings] county court day, which was the first Monday of every month. Can you stop it?

K: Yeah, I'll stop it.

[cut in recording]

34:17 K: Okay, go on with your //

V: Parsley was an extensive landowner in Edmonson County, and he usually, well always went to county court at Brownsville on the first Monday of every month to try to pick up some additional land and a master of commissioner sale. He was a prominent man, a well-known man through Edmonson County. So Mr. Holland sent Joe and me down there to tear the house down on this place. We took about sixty three-C boys from number three camp, and we took along a foreman by the name of Brachs Colms, who was a mountaineer from up in Perry County, Kentucky. And Brachs Colms armed himself with a revolver, which he kept at camp, and away we went down there. We found nobody about at this farm home, which was a two-story frame building on a hill on the south side of the river at Houchins Ferry. Well these boys set to work tearing his house down. They pretty quickly had the roof off, and the second floor pretty nearly

demolished, but somebody crossing the Houchins Ferry heard all the racket going on up on the hill where we were. They went into Brownsville and found Parsley and told him that something was taking place at his old homeplace, and he'd better get up there and see about it. So Parsley left quickly out of Brownsville, armed with a twelve gauge shotgun, and he was accompanied by a man, I believe it was a tenant that he intended to place in this farm home. And he arrived up on the hill where we was, mad as everything, and out of breath. He jammed that shotgun into my chest and told me that, to call off the boys, and stop work, and get away from the place. Well it didn't look good there for a little while. Brachs Colms had his hand on his revolver, Joe was standing by me, and some of the three-C boys gathered around. And it looked pretty bad there. I told Parsley that he was in as much danger as I was from the man standing behind him with his revolver, and that we were not gonna leave, that that was park property. We were taking possession of it. It was not his, he had sold it, he had no right to retain possession, and we were going to continue with our work until and unless he got an injunction or a restraining order of some kind from the local court and had it delivered by somebody from the sheriff's department. And if he did that, then we would quit what we were doing and leave. As I say, at the time, it was a proposed national park. The National Park Service had no jurisdiction whatsoever in the place. So we were under subject to the local laws. Though Parsley had cooled down by this time, he left real hurriedly, and went back to Brownsville. Well while he was gone, I put the boys to work on the barn. There was only one barn there. So when Parsley got back with the deputy sheriff and a restraining order, the house was down, the barn was down, so nobody could live on the place to farm it.

37:54 V: Well, the news of this incident got around quickly too, because Parsley was a well-known person. And a lot of the original owners, I'm sure, began to check with their lawyers to see if they had any legal right to stay on their land. And surely got advice that they had no legal authority, because there was nothing in writing as far as these so-called gentlemen's agreements are concerned. And some of them began to move away. We began to give these twenty day notices to them as well as to the tenants. Parsley pursued this in court to try to get a permanent injunction against us, but he was never able to do so. I remember having to go to Bowling Green and gave a deposition there in regard to this incident. But as far as I can remember, nothing ever came of it. That is, he was determined, of course, though he had no written right to be in possession of the land. So he had no valid, legal reason to control the land there. So anyway, the people began to move away. Joe Heron, who was a former landowner at Sloan's Crossing, he decided he would try in court to keep possession. And I remember a judge from Bowling Green, a circuit judge from Bowling Green, not from Brownsville. We never got any help from anybody from Brownsville at all. But this circuit judge from Bowling Green, his name was, as I remember, Porter Sims. He heard this case, and he ruled all these gentlemen's agreements, and he ruled against Joe Heron. So that settled this so-called gentlemen's agreement issue. And the people then began to move away. But of course, all this direct action we'd taken created a tremendous amount of hostility.

40:05 V: Most of the people allowed to stay in the park were good, law-abiding, religious people. But there was a lawless element. And there was plenty of moonshine whiskey around to add to the lawlessness. So we began to be in pretty grave danger of our lives. I know Joe was shot at one time as he went down the river in a boat, and I was shot at in the woods on the north side of the river. And we had a car that was parked on the side of the road up near Hickory Cabin, that was just literally riddled with bullets. And we believe that these incidents were meant to intimidate us, and really not to hurt us. So we didn't take them too seriously. Now up to this point, Joe and I had not been allowed to carry firearms. Mr. Holland reasoned that since we couldn't get any

help or cooperation from the local authorities, there was no use of pursuing any cases in court. And he couldn't conceive—being the type of man he was, he couldn't conceive of anyone shooting an unarmed man. But Joe and I were all over here in uniform, we're not allowed at the time to carry firearms. And that was to be a grave mistake. A mistake that almost got me killed. But we began to have some serious threats against our life. I know many a time that we would approach a house, we were covered by a gun from inside of the house, and it was just a miracle that we lived through the time. We began to have some incendiary fires. They were set for spite, that is to try to damage the park all they could by this lawless element. And they were a small minority, but just a small number of them could do great damage. So they would set these fires in this broomsatch [?] fields, where they would ignite quickly. So the boys began, the three-C boys, especially the boys in number four camp in the north district began to spend a lot of their time fighting fires. That gave rise to the establishment of a real fine first class fire protection system under the direction of the park forester by the name of Ivan Ellsworth, who was a very able man. Three primary steel towers were constructed, and three secondary towers were constructed. So the dispatcher's office was set up at Mammoth Cave, fires were detected from the towers, and reported to the dispatcher, and crews were sent out from the camps to suppress the fires.

43:11 K: So did the CCC, aside from that one time when you taking down that house, did they have much to do with what you were doing?

V: Well every time, every time one of the homes was vacated, or any of the buildings vacated, they demolished the buildings. And of course, any usable lumber was given to the local people if they asked for it, or any materials that could be of use to either former owners or tenants, or people who had a need for the materials. And anything else was burned up, and the places were demolished, and the area was leveled. And of course, they tried to dispose of the fencing and other indications of habitation of man. They did a great deal of work as far as erosion control was concerned and reforestation. 'Cause see, land there had been in use for a hundred and forty, hundred and fifty years. Most of the people are descendents of the original settlers in the area. And the land had been occupied for a long long time, and it had been used and abused over all that period of time. So there was a great deal of erosion. And they began to work to control that. 'Course they set out trees to reforest the areas. So, it was a gradual rebuilding or restoration of the land into its original state. Now these people, of course, as they moved away, they left a lot of cats. I remember everybody seemed to have a lot of cats. And those cats were a menace, of course to the small game in the area. And one of the jobs that Joe and I had was to dispose of the cats. But they, the three-C boys were, of course, busy at building roads. They were busy working in the Mammoth Cave itself, improving the trails and the walkways, the bridges, and other wooden structures in the cave. It was during one of their projects in 1935 that they found the mummy, the Indian mummy that made such a sensation at the time, and was so widely publicized. They built picnic areas and the first picnic areas at Mammoth Cave were built by the three-C enrollees. They, of course, their primary priority was given to the improvement of the roads. They had graveled just about all the main roads. By this time too, quite a number of the local people had secured employment around the camps at various types of jobs, skilled jobs and unskilled jobs. And some of the enrollees married into these local families. So that all helped a great deal to decrease the hostility. And of course, a lot of the time was spent in fighting fires because this lawless element was determined to cause as much trouble as possible. So they literally set hundreds of fires. I'd say in the period, about 1935 and '36, we had, one year, I believe, over six hundred fires. It was a terrible time. But there was very little that we could do about it. We, at one time, we actually caught two boys in the act, very act of setting a fire on

park land, but we could not get them prosecuted at Brownsville. So the only thing we could do was just to suppress the fires and then to await federal jurisdiction when we could get our cases into federal court. And then we could control it. But up to that time, it was impossible to control, because there were only Joe and I and Mr. Holland. Mr. Holland, of course, was busy with office work a great deal of the time. So he wasn't with us very much of the time. And so just the two of us to patrol that whole area. And then of course, they usually knew where we were, and it was easy enough to set fires, and they could be gone long before we would ever get there. So we just had to sort of put up with this until a federal jurisdiction took place. But the land by this time, the balance of the land was being bought. The federal government had appropriated money to buy the balance of the land within the park, and land buyers were present there, and they had to go and buy the land. Where they could buy it peaceably, they did, but where they couldn't, why, they went into federal court in Bowling Green and brought condemnation suits, and a jury would decide on the price of the land. So uh, things were moving, but still, we were faced with this lawless element. I remember that we had a great deal of trouble with moonshining and bootlegging. And we got the help of two investigators from the alcohol and tax unit who were stationed in Bowling Green. And Joe and I swore out search warrants for several of the homes where we knew bootlegging was going on, moonshine whiskey. And we assisted these investigators in searching these homes, and we made several cases, which were federal cases in Bowling Green, and that very effectively stopped the selling of moonshine whiskey in the park. We also helped in raiding one moonshine still. So that, of course, several hundred three-C boys, the ones that they were trying to sell, or did sell moonshine whiskey to. So we dried up the supply of moonshine whiskey pretty effectively that way.

49:37 V: And then these threats against our life continued. And finally in October, October 28th, 1935, why, an incident took place that very nearly got me killed. We'd gotten an anonymous tip that some hunting was going on on the north district, just north of the turn hole, about two miles north of the turn hole. And Joe and I were sent over there to check it out. About the only thing that we've been able to do to control the hunting up to this point had been to warn the people off, tell them that they were trespassing, that hunting was not permitted within the park. And we had been rather successful in getting the cooperation of the people, but this time, we didn't know, but a conspiracy had been developed among some of the local people, some of our enemies, to shoot one of the rangers. And they, then these conspirators did not want to do the dirty job themselves, so they got a man who was out on parole, a man by the name of Parker. He had served part of a sentence for murder and was out on parole at the time, and they got him to do this job for them. Now we didn't know Parker, never had heard of him, didn't even know his name. And we didn't know his reputation, but he was a dangerous man, had been in numerous violent acts around the area, one stabbing I remember. He stabbed a boy at Stockholm one time, walked up behind him and stuck a knife in his back. He was a treacherous man, a bushwhacking type of fellow. But we didn't know who he was, and so we were at a great disadvantage, of course. The two of us were in uniform. So as we got near this area, we heard some gunfire, and Joe and I separated, he went around to the right and I went directly towards these hunters, and I got there first. There were three of them. Two of them, their names were Davis, and they lived at the mouth of Buffalo. And Parker was ready and waiting when I got there. I guess I was within about a hundred feet of him when, before they ever saw me. And so immediately, he saw me, why, he leveled his shotgun at me, told me to stop. I told him that he was on parkland, that hunting was prohibited, that he was a trespasser, and he was to leave. He was not to hunt on parkland. And as I stepped forward a couple steps, why, I stepped over a log that was lying on the ground, and I suppose that—I always thought, at least, that that threw my body out of line, so as he pulled the

trigger, instead of me getting the charge fully in my chest, I got a part of it in my left arm and shoulder. Well, of course that stunned me, and actually, it turned me sideways, the force of the shot in my arm and shoulder. And he pulled out a revolver out of his pocket. It was a single shot shotgun. And uh, looked like about a thirty-eight caliber, and he leveled that me, and well, I figured he was gonna finish the job. 'Course, I was unarmed. I didn't even have a pocket knife. But uh, apparently, he must've thought I was pretty badly hit, or for some reason—I never knew why—he put his revolver back in his pocket, ran off and left me there. These two boys that were with him, these Davis boys, had run off before he ever fired the first shot. They immediately, he ordered me to stop, why, they were gone. Joe heard this shot, 'course Parker had run off and left me, and I was alone there. Joe had heard the shot, had came that direction, found me. He helped me back to the river, which was about two miles away. We got there, and it was shortly after noon. We'd been set over on the north by a man by the name of Rich who lived two or three hundred yards from the turn hole, from the river, and he was to pick us up about three o'clock. But this was earlier, and we, we tried to attract his attention. I'd lost a lot of blood by this time, pretty weak. I dripped blood all the way down me, ran down my arms and fingers, to the river. And Joe was having to practically carry me by the time I got that far. So Rich couldn't hear Joe call, and it'd begun to rain pretty heavily by this time too. Well Joe stripped off and dived in the river. This is the 28th of October, pretty chilly. He was a very strong swimmer, and he swam over and got this skiff, and came back and got me, had got me up to number three camp at Joppa. The doctor who provided the medical care for the enrollees happened to be at the camp and gave me first aid. Mr. Holland was notified, he was down there very quickly and took me on to the hospital at Glasgow. I got over this wound pretty quickly. I was young. I was only twenty at the time, and strong, and active. So I got over it pretty quickly.

55:24 V: But that, actually, that incident, it resulted, actually, to be in our favor. Because the good people, the decent people, the better class of people in the area were revolted by this attack on an unarmed man, this conspiracy. It was a pretty well-known thing that's what had happened. And so, we, really, it worked in our favor in the long run, because Parker was known throughout the area. He had always been in trouble. So he was not, certainly, a well-liked person. But he was related to quite a few people in the area, and uh, so although there was an effort made to find him, why, he was pretty well protected by these relatives. Immediately, Mr. Holland armed Joe and me. He got some GI-forty-five revolvers from the Army, and a lot of ammunition, so he being an expert pistol shot, he soon had us pretty well trained in the use of handguns. And from that time on, why, things got a little better for us, because we were then able to shoot back if anybody shot at us. And we teamed up with a man who was a deputy sheriff there at Mammoth Cave, who was assigned there, and actually, I believe he was paid by the Kentucky National Park Commission. His main job was to keep order around the hotel and in that vicinity. And we went on a hunt for Parker, but we were never able to catch him, because his relatives protected him. And a little later, why, he surrendered voluntarily to the authorities of Brownsville and was given some small fine, which didn't amount to anything. He wasn't even sent back to prison for the balance of his term, but he was out on parole for murder. So uh, it just showed that the local people had very little regard for those of us, staff up in the park, and uh, the lack of cooperation that they gave to us at this time. But from that time on, we were able to protect ourselves, and things got better for us. And of course, the land was rapidly being bought, the land was being vacated, and uh, so then two weeks, again to make some cases, because the—in federal court—that is the land that had been paid for by federal money could be, any violations on their land could be taken into federal court at Bowling Green. So we became well acquainted with the U.S. commissioner down there who happened to be Marshall Funk at Bowling Green. And we had great cooperation from him and then some of these cases heard in the district court at Bowling

Green. We would swear us arrest warrants and then assist the deputy U.S. Marshall in serving the warrants, and then the cases would be heard. It's where it had to do with the land purchased with federal funds. And uh, on September 1st, 1936, the National Park Service assumed jurisdiction of the land that had been purchased, all of the land that had been bought. Jurisdiction for protection purposes only. And from that point on, we were able to get all of our cases heard in the federal court at Bowling Green. Joe and I became, we got appointments from the National Park Service as temporary park rangers. Mr. Holland became acting superintendent. The, things got better from that point on. The fires continued for some time, but they decreased in number. And because we, the people, the violators, were then taken into federal court at Bowling Green, we had some respect for the law.

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