

8-6-1987

# Interview with George Childress Regarding CCC (FA 81)

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TRANSCRIPT

**RECORDING NO.:** Tape 23

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**INTERVIEWER:** Kelly Lally

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**INTERVIEWEE:** Georgie Childress

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**DATE OF INTERVIEW:** 8/6/1987

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**PLACE OF INTERVIEW:** Union Light, KY

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**OTHER PEOPLE PRESENT:**

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**EQUIPMENT USED:**

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**AMOUNT OF RECORDING (TAPE/MINIDISK) USED:** 52:03

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**DESCRIPTION OF CONTENTS:**

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**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.

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**KEY:** K=Kelly Lally

G=Georgie Childress

*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

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0:00 K: This is Kelly Lally, and I'm here in Union Light, Kentucky, with Mr. Georgie Childress. Today is August the 6<sup>th</sup>, 1987. When were you born, Mr. Childress?

G: October 14<sup>th</sup>, 1919.

K: And where did you grow up?

G: Here in Edmonson County. Back at that time, our post office was Straw, Kentucky. S-T-R-A-W. And that's where I grew up to be a young man, in the forks of Nolin and Green River, about twelve or fourteen miles north of Brownsville. And our address was Straw, Kentucky, until years later. Then it was changed to Mammoth Cave. Kentucky, which it still is.

K: What did your family do for a living, Mr. Childress?

G: Did then?

K: Uh-huh.

G: Farm. Raised on a farm.

K: How many children were in your family?

G: Twelve.

K: Wow. Where did you fall in that number?

G: I'm the oldest boy. I have a sister older than I. And I'm the oldest boy. I have—There's four boys and eight girl—Eight boys and four girls, sorry. Eight boys and four girls. And I'm the oldest boy.

1:34 K: What were times like for your family during the Depression?

G: Oh, hard. Hard. This gets down to the grass roots of things. Times were hard. My brother next to me and my father, we would go to, a lot of times, in the summer, during the Depression, we'd get a sack apiece, each of us, all three, and we'd go into these hollers, and we'd dig wild ginger and may apple. Roots. And bring them home and wash them and dry them. Carry them about, I'd say, two mile to a dealer here in this community, and we'd sell them in exchange to buy bread. It was hard. Times were hard. But there was no jobs. Finally, WPA under President Roosevelt came in this community, and my father got a job at that, which relieved some of the heartaches and the hardships. And back at, in that time too, if you raised a crop of tobacco, you didn't get anything out of it to amount to anything at all. And I have heard my daddy say that he'd ship his tobacco to Louisville back at that time, and they'd send him a dun to pay the floor expense. It wouldn't bring anything, you know. And it went over the floor, and it didn't bring enough to pay the floor expense. And they'd send him a bill //

K: Oh geez.

G: // to pay the expenses. So times were hard. During the fall of the year, uh, people has gotten away from this now. We would have a local mill, a grist mill to grind corn, to make cornbread. And a lot of times we wouldn't have enough corn to last until the next season, hard corn, of course. And my mother would make a gritter. A lot of people wouldn't know what I'm talking about now, but you take a piece of metal and you take a nail and a hammer, and lay it on the board, and drive it full of holes. And then you bend this piece and tack it on each side of a board and bend it upwards, and let the rough part stick up. And you'd take an ear of corn and scrub it back and forth over that, and it would get this corn off, and it would fall through, in other words, on the inside and into a tray or a bowl. And they'd make bread out of it. And that was so good!

4:17 K: Well how did you hear about the CCC, Mr. Childress?

G: Well, the CCC, I don't really know how I came to hear about it. I guess through a merchant. Seemed to me like my father came in one day and told me, told my mother, that they was gonna take all the young boys and send them off to CCC camp to work. And my mother cried. She didn't want me to have to go. She didn't know it was volunteer at that time. But it went on in a little bit, and I wasn't old enough to go. So a lady came to the store, Mr. J.T. Sanders run this store and post office at Straw. And I heard she's gonna be there that day to interview some boys and take some names to go to the CCC camp, and so I went up, and upped my age, and lo and behold, they're taking me. In just a day or two, I got a notice to appear over at Mammoth Cave at number two camp for examination. And I went over there, and was examined. Then shipped onto Fort Knox. And from Fort Knox, I stayed a few days, Fort Knox onto Henrieville, Utah, where I spent six months, and then returned home.

K: So how old were you really when you went into the CCC?

G: Fifteen.

K: Fifteen?

G: I made it sixteen.

K: Uh-huh. And sixteen, they even accepted you at sixteen?

G: Mm-hmm.

K: Hm.

5:53 K: So first you went into Utah.

G: Mm-hmm.

K: What did you do while you were out in Utah?

G: Well, for a while, we build, built trails for the sheep herders and the cattle drives. They had to have trails over these mountains, and we'd take shovels and hoes and spades, what have you, and dig a dirt trail around these mountains. Gradually go up, and then when you get to the top, you'd gradually go down around these mountains for the cattle to make a shortcut through the mountains to be transferred from one place to another. Then, we would, if they found a spring, you know, where water—out there, the lye was alkaline dirt, and water wouldn't run anyway. It'd just come out of the ground and sink. And so if they found a spring, or any amount of water, why, we would go to the forest and cut down a large pine tree, and cut a log of say twelve or fifteen feet long. And we'd flatten that about a third. Hew it down to about a third. Take about a third of it off, and then we'd take a foot adze, which was an axe in one sense of the word, a thing that chopped out chips. And we would chop a holler, make a trough out of this log, and we'd place one on the ground for sheep, and leave a space between it and the next one for cattle, and then put a third on top for horses. And some cases, they would be nine tall. One emptied out into the other, for preserving this water for cattle to drink when the drive would come through, because water was so scarce, there very seldom was a place for the cattle to drink. We did that, and then we did a lot of erosion work in those canyons out there. It just come down to a narrow space in the bottom. And occasionally when a big snow would come, there would be a little runoff. And sometimes it get down, and it would have a terrible washout in these flat places, and we'd dig a trench across this flat, flat space, and set a line of cedar posts where it couldn't go back in this place. And that would gradually fill up. We worked horses to pull these poles out of the woods. They weren't very thick to start with. Cedar. Out on the prairie, with short stuff. In the canyons and the forests where it was tall, and we built telephone lines into the place. Built some roads. Kept busy. And we had a lot of fun, us boys did. But I had never saw a porcupine. And [laughs] one day while we's cutting the right of way for a telephone line, a tree was out of the right of way, but we had saw some droppings on the ground during the snow, and I told one of my buddies, I said, "There's something up that tree. So we got to looking, there's a porcupine up the tree. We ate our dinner real quick and got our axe apiece, and we went back and we cut this tree down to get this porcupine. And so, I got me a little matchbox, a

penny matchbox back at that time. I pulled the quills out of it, and got me a matchbox full of quills and brought them in. It was something unusual. I never had seen one. It was an experience, a real good experience. Going out there, and seeing the country, and doing the work. But I was young, I got homesick. I got homesick.

9:28 G: And when my time was up in six months, I came home, and I stayed about three or four months out, and I reenlisted and went back and spent the rest of my time over here at Mammoth Cave in the CCC camp. And over there, I did different work. We went in the woods, and got down all of the dead brush. Beat it down, let it lay flat on the ground. And we would lay it on the contour of the hill, you know. And then from that I went to the fire tower. I was fire guard. And on my off days, when it was in the week time, my buddies, I would go to Mammoth Cave and go in there and stay all day with them. They policed up, doing the police work in there, picked up trash and stuff. I'd go in there and stay all day some days with them, just be in Mammoth Cave and have nothing else to do. And it's about ten or twelve mile, and a lot of weekends, I'd have to walk all the way from there to home. And then start back walking, and occasionally, somebody come along and pick me up. Didn't make no money, you didn't have no money, you just made a dollar a day, and twenty-five dollars that was sent home. You only had five dollars. And if your parents were poor, it took just about all of that, you know, for them to live. But they would save me a little money occasionally. That was the purpose of it anyhow, to send the money home to the parents. But some parents didn't need it, and they saved it for their boys, which was good. And they could buy an automobile and have a good time. But not me. We were really poor.

11:04 K: So what year did you begin your work in the camp, at the CCC camps at Mammoth Cave?

G: 1936.

K: '36?

G: Mm-hmm. 1936. And I was in there during that flood in '37 in Louisville, when the big flood came. And I had an experience while I was over there in the CCC camp. We was at Joppa, number three, where I first went to. Later years, it disbanded, and all the members moved to other camps, and then I went to number two camp. But in the meantime, while I was at number three camp at Joppa, we had this, I was on fire patrol, on fire guard, and another friend of mine was on fire guard, name of Billy Kursey. And the fire tower was, where we were located, the camp was located, was west towards Brownsville, and was called Brooks Knob fire tower. And we were up there, and all the buildings—When the park had taken all the land, they'd tear all the buildings down of course. And right down below this fire tower, my friend was on fire guard one night, and some folks come along and told him if he heard a noise, be sure—they didn't use, they used other words—that he didn't open his mouth. And after a while, he could hear them removing the roof off of this, there was a barn down the side of the road, and he could hear these men removing this roof, this metal roof off this barn. So he reported it, and the barn run with the road, one side to the road, and the other on the opposite side. And they're taking the roof off, away from the road, where you couldn't see it from the road. But he could hear them, and he reported. At that time, at Mammoth Cave, the superintendent of Mammoth Cave was Mr. Holland. And the two rangers was Ranger Ridge and Ranger Wells. And we went, the next morning, my barracks was on duty, and we were called to go—They'd found this roofing where this man had put it up in his barn loft. And my barracks was on duty that week, and they called us late one afternoon and told us we were going to gather this roofing, get some

proof where this roofing had been. They'd found it, that this feller had stole off the park. So a boy by the name of Miller and myself climbed up in the second story of this barn, and had this roof out in the back. And we brought it home, brought it to the camp that night. But meantime, while we were there, why, the dress marshal and Mr. Holland, they came and got this man, taking him to Bowling Green. And that was a great relief, but we were scared when we was up in this barn, handing this roof out, you know. It was a private place. We didn't know what we might get shot. And the next—We brought that back to camp, and the next morning, we were detailed to go back out to this barn and take the roofing that came off the end, place these pieces up there, and take nails and see if the nail holes would match in the sheeting that had come off of where they were pulled out. And when we'd lay it up there, the nails would go on right through the roof and through the sheeting, see. And we were up on that, and they're taking pictures of us up on the barn. And meanwhile, down below was a house that the people lived in. Nobody didn't come out of that house for a while, but, after a while Mr. Holland come with a, had a big forty-four, forty-five pistol. And we were just settin' ducks up on this barn, us boys, you know. And it was scary. We could've got killed. And when this superintendent came with his gun, why, we saw some folks go out of this house and go off over the hill. But that night when they come to hunt, to find this roofing, they heard this car coming, they just kicked their truck out of gear, and it rolled off over the hill, in behind a plum thicket, and hid. But the next morning they found it, and they got the roofing. They found where the roofing was, it was up in this barn. We got it. And then we had to go to Bowling Green. I have a summons in there, where I was summonsed to go to federal court on this. And that was one experience, you know, that stands out in one sense of the word, more than any of the rest, because we were in danger. We coulda got hurt.

K: Yeah, I talked to Vernon Wells a couple of weeks ago, and he was telling me a very similar story.

G: He got—Did he tell you about him getting shot?

K: Yes he did.

G: Oh, he almost got killed.

K: That's what he said.

G: Oh, he almost got killed. I didn't know he was still alive.

K: Yeah, he lives in Erlanger. Up around Cincinnati. I'll give you the address before I leave, if you'd like it.

G: Ridge and Wells were the two rangers. Yeah, he like got killed. He got shot. And the man that shot him *is* dead.

K: Yeah, I heard about that.

16:26 K: Well, um, you say you worked in the fire tower, and also cleaning out some brush. Did you do any other work while you were //

G: Yes. Later on, when we had to tie this—When we moved from Joppa to New Entrance, which was number two at Mammoth Cave—At the beginning it was one, two, three, four. Four camps over there. The colored were in number one. White were in number two, and three, and four. And number four is over in the Good Springs community. And number three was over across the river, north from—it'd be south from here, at Joppa, number three was. And number two was at the New Entrance of Mammoth Cave at that time, what they called the New Entrance. And when number three disbanded, why, I was on guard over there for a long time, to keep anybody from coming, vandalizing the building, buildings, and getting anything. Then when they decided to move everything out and tear it down, why, I was, I helped tear it down and dig up some, the water lines, which was iron, or galvanized pipe at that time. And from that, then when, almost got ready for me to, I'd say six months before I left, we were building a road, which was labor, lot of it just hand labor, from the main Mammoth Cave road, down to the new ferry at Mammoth Cave. And they didn't hardly have the road done when they passed the law if I'd been in so long you had to get out. And so that's whenever I come out. We didn't hardly get the road done down at the ferry. And I left the CCC camp, didn't try to go back in anymore.

K: And what year was that you ended up leaving?

G: '38.

K: '38?

G: 1938.

18:16 K: And also, did I hear you say that you worked with the men from camp number one? Rock crusher?

G: Oh yes, yeah, at a certain time, the number one camp finally, they—I don't know how come to move the white boys out and put the colored in the rock quarry. And when they did that, then I got the job of taking care of the rock crusher, keeping it greased, and changing oil in the motor, keeping gasoline in it, and the air compressor. And then I was the dynamite man. Sometimes I would load a charge too heavy, and—no experience, you know. I remember one time I put a charge off, and I loaded the top one too heavy, and it blew a great big rock and went up in the air and come down and hit the building where the motor that pulled the rock crusher—It hit the top of that, went through the roof, right down to the engine. It didn't hit it, but it went all the way through! [laughs]

K: [laughs] You were lucky, weren't you?

G: Yeah, yeah. We built roads all over the park area and kept up the roads, which were gravel, of course. Wasn't any blacktop at that time. It was a help to the community I'd say. We had to watch, and we'd be on fire detail, and a lot of times it'd take you a long time to put out these fires where people would deliberately set. They didn't like it, 'cause they bought them out, and they had the fire flies—They'd ride mules and set fires on one hill, and ride on across and set on another. Just keep going, you know. And you'd have to fight fires sometimes for days.

20:06 K: Let's see. Um, well how much free time did you have, total?

G: I just had two days a week. And when we were, when we were detailed, certain barracks—A barracks is a place that houses so many men. And every week, one barracks would be on duty, in other words, for like fire, or whatever the case might be. And when we were on duty, there'd be so many detailed out of that barracks to go to kitchen, wash dishes, pots and pans in other words. Or nightwatch, somebody'd have to nightwatch. I'd usually nightwatch, because I never did like for my hands to be down in that grease. [laughs] Pots and pans. You'd have to peel spuds. Over that whole weekend, because the cooks and the helpers would get a leave. And we'd have to substitute, take over while they's gone. There wouldn't be very many in the camp over the weekend, just that one barracks, mostly.

21:10 K: Well what did you do with your free time when you weren't on //

G: I'd come home, probably, most time. I'd go to church on weekends, or I'd be running around, walking around over night, going somewhere. I never was no hand to—I didn't go anywhere much. I was a homeboy. I didn't venture out too much. I was too backward. And I'd go to church, which is right here where I live now. In my community. At age thirteen, I got saved in an old time church. That's where I joined and still a member. And I'd come home and want to go to church on that weekend. In this country, back at that time, you'd just have church once a month, on Saturday and then Sunday. Then the rest of the time, you had three weekends that was free to go somewhere else. And when I was home, I'd go to church. For my free time. And when I wasn't, I'd stay at home or visit my neighbors. Something like that.

22:13 K: Uh, to what extent did you participate in any of the organized recreation or education programs at the camps? I know they had baseball teams and things like that. Did you participate //

G: No, I did not. I'd watch them. I'd go to the games and watch, but I got hurt when I went to school. We'd play baseball. Baseball was a favorite game of mine, and that's my favorite sport, and I still love it. But we didn't have no catcher's mitt, and I had to catch, and I got my fingers stove [?] up, and I didn't want to play with them. They could throw that ball hard. And 'course, we had to make our balls that we had, you know. I would ravel out an old sock top, and get the little piece of rubber to put inside of that and wide it up and sew it and make a ball. Anything to have a good time.

K: Did you participate in any of the education programs at the camp?

G: Uh, no. I don't believe I did. I might have at Joppa. Seems to me it's been so long, and I had surgery a year ago, and it's done something to my memory. I can't put things together sometimes like I ought to. But we had an educational advisor, Mr. Robinson. And it seems to me that I did participate some in my nights. I'd be at the camp after supper, or lunch. We'd go to education—I'm sure I did. I can remember a little something about it. We had a recreation hall, and we'd gather. I'm sure now that I did, because I can remember seeing him, and he would talk to us, and explain things to us.

24:01 K: What other things did you do at night after your work?

G: Well, me and the boys, sometime we'd play little games in the barracks. Occasionally the trucks would load us up and take us to Cave City to see a movie. And the movie'd only cost us ten cents back at that time. Go in and see a movie if you had ten cents, and the truck was going,

why, you could go and ride free and see a movie. About the only ones we were interested in was cowboy shows. [laughs] Back at that time. It was, to me it was a great experience. And it didn't make no—Oh, I don't know what to say, hardly. It didn't make no great thing out of me, only I've got an experience to look back to at some things, you know. It was a good thing back at that time for the boys. I was in camp with boys from all over the state of Kentucky, and some from Ohio, Indiana. And some of them were mean. Mean.

25:10 K: Did the boys play many pranks on each other?

G: Yes they did.

K: Do you remember any of them?

G: Well yes, when a new one would come in, they'd pick on him, you know. Uh, one time in particular—I didn't get to stay over here at Mammoth Cave now. We were all new where I went, when I went to Utah, then I was used to it when I come back. I think six months, and I knowed what to expect. So when they tell me something, I just—So-and-so was needing me, why, I just go on about my business. And they'd soon forget it, because they'd find out I'd been in before. But when I went in over here at the Mammoth Cave, at number two entrance, there's new boys come in, and they wouldn't've, the officers wouldn't've let it happen if they'd'a known it, but they had one ol' boy to go out there at Mammoth Cave, the number two Mammoth Cave hotel. And the flag, they had a flag, American flag, you know. And they had him to go out there and stand guard at the flagpole all night.

K: Oh no.

G: [laughs]

K: Oh no.

G: And they'd go tell him to go and get a—Have him to go and get a sky stretcher, or anything was impossible, you know. They'd send him up to the tool shed to check this out. You'd have to sign your name, and so on and so forth, what you got, and they'd pull pranks on him like that to send him up after things that didn't even exist. Just to have fun.

26:45 K: Was there much interaction among the different camps at Mammoth Cave? Like two and three, or one and two?

G: Well, when I was at number two, [pauses]

K: Go ahead.

G: When I was at number two, I, that was when I'd done the fire tower, most the fire tower, fire guard work. In my off days, I'd go to Mammoth Cave and go in with my buddies and just walk around. We didn't stay in there on the off days. It was through the week. And sometimes you'd have to fire guard over the weekend, you know. And you had a map up there on the tower, and when a fire would be spotted, you had a circle on that with figures on it, and then you had a pointer in the center of that that you could turn. And they would call you when a fire was spotted. Another one of the guards had turned it in, and then they'd call you. And the first one

called it in would give his direction, then you'd see if you could spot the fire, and you'd give your direction. And on this map, when they give these directions, these pointers would cross right where the fire was. And they could get a load of men in a few minutes and go and be right at the fire. And I did most of, most of my fire patrol was from number two. And from that to taking care of the air compressor in the crusher engine, and the crusher. I'd have to grease the crusher and the conveyor that carried the rock up to the bin where it'd empty off. As I said a while ago, they called them—I was a dynamite man, but actually, they called it “powder monkey” back that time. You know, you'd shoot the rock off with the—And you had to take what they called “nippin' hammers,” small hammers and beat, burst these rock small, and pick them up by hand and load them in the truck. This truck then, dump truck, it would haul them up to the crusher and dump them, and they'd be crushed. And we'd use the rock from the line to build roads, keep the roads up.

K: Let me go ahead and turn the tape over.

[cut in recording]

29:05 K: This is the second side of the tape of my interview with Mr. Georgie Childress. So, in general, would you say that the camps pretty much kept, different camps pretty much kept to themselves, or occasionally they'd run into guys from any other ones.

G: Occasionally they would, but most of the time they'd stay to theirselves. Each—If they went to town, they would stay together mostly. And occasionally, why, they would mix and get into a brawl or something, and when they did, why, each camp would take up for the other, you know. Take up for its own. Now out at Utah, we were six miles from the nearest little town, a little town called Henrieville. The next one was about three miles, Cannonville. Then about three or four miles from that was another town called Tropic. Well every week on Friday night, each one of these little towns would have a dance. They'd have some string music, and they'd have a dance. And I never did try to dance any, but I'd go just to get away from camp. And uh, these boys would get drunk. And oh, sometimes they'd come in, their head—Somebody'd beat them off, you know. But I never did drink any. I never did get in no fights. But some of the boys would, and I'd hate to see them come in in the shape they were in. One night, one evening in particular, me and a boy by the name of Crow were digging telephone line, telephone post holes through town in Henrieville, and we went in this little store to get us something to drink, and we decided we'd buy us a pocketknife. So he and I bought us a pocketknife a piece, and that was on Friday. And that night, why—And while we were there, one of the local men come in, he saw us buy these knives. And they were afraid of a knife out there—Them residents out there in Utah, they were afraid of a knife as I would be a snake. So they saw us buy these knives, and that night when we went to—The trucks got us and took us all down to the dance, and I was just settin' in there watching them, and I looked out the window, and I don't know how many heads I saw looking in the window. They saw us buy those knives that day, and they's afraid there's gonna //

K: Be trouble.

G: // afraid we were gonna cut them, you know. But we didn't buy it for that purpose. Us two wouldn't. Now there was some mean ones that was with us. They'd been in the penitentiary, and they were mean. They'd get drunk, and Lord help, they'd turn your beds over every night. Mean.

31:50 K: At Mammoth Cave, did they have any dances like that?

G: Yeah. They did. They'd go to Bowling Green. I never did go to one of them at Mammoth Cave, but they did have them at—They had them at a building called the Hoopee House. It was just under the hill from Mammoth Cave toward the colored camp, which was number one. And I went down there to see a show one night, but I never did go to none of the dances. They'd go to Bowling Green and get truckloads of women in Glasgow and bring them in there for these boys to dance with. I was too backward. I never would go. I never did go to a dance or anything. I'd always come home. But I did go down to see a show one night. And I was at the Hoopee House. And I believe I was down there at the dedication when they dedicated it.

32:44 K: Well how did um, how did the white people in the area feel about the presence of blacks in a camp nearby?

G: Well we didn't mix. I never had anything anytime against the colored. But we didn't work together. They worked with themselves, and we worked with ourselves. Only time that I was with them, were when I was taking care of the rock crusher and the air compressor, which was run by number two camp after I transferred over there. The colored men did the sledgehammer work, loading the trucks, and the labor work, and I was there to see that the air compressor kept going, and the rock crusher was kept, gasoline and oil change and the motor. Gasoline in for it to run, and then grease the conveyor that moved the rock out. And when I wasn't doing anything else, why, when a truck pulled in, why I would just, all you had to do was go down and take ahold of a big lever and open up the slide and let that trucks down there loaded with rock, you know, crushed rock, and they'd take it out and spread it on the road. Come back. If I wasn't busy I would do that during my spare time. But I was usually busy most of the time, when I had all that to do.

34:03 K: Were there any instances of racial tension in the area that you remember?

G: No. Not as I recall at all.

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

G: Well, I—as far as I know, at first it was kinda like the Job Corps moving in there, that community. They didn't like—The main thing they didn't like was the government buying their land, and for them having to move out. And some of it, they'd buy all around a certain person, and leave him settin' in the center, and he'd still be there. And of course, they'd have to go to court and condemn it, and take court action, and then he'd have to sell. And some of the residents at that time were so upset, as I told you a while ago, about setting these fires, they'd ride mules across these hollers, and they'd set a fire on top of one hill and take off and go all the way across, a mile or so, and set another one, and just keep going. So you'd get one put out, and there'd be another one burning, you'd get it put out, there'd be another one burning. Sometimes it'd keep you on the go. And that was one way they had of trying to get even with Uncle Sam for buying that and putting them out of there.

K: So it wasn't so much the CCC specifically they were upset with, it was more the government.

G: Mm-hmm.

K: Was there much interaction with the local residents and the CCC?

G: Well, now they were at places—You know, they thought they were troublemakers a whole lot. Even in town, like Cave City and Brownsville and different places. They'd watch you when they went in town. They could pretty well tell when somebody's trying to make trouble. But it was kinda just moreso of a thing like the Job Corps is today. People moving in, unaware, and not knowing who they were. They thought we were just outcasts or castoffs I guess. Boys that uh—But there was lots of good boys in there with me, because I was in with lots of local boys.

36:17 K: Did many of the men date local girls?

G: Yes. And some of the boys that come out of other states married the local girls. Mm-hmm.

K: Well how successful do you think the CCC was in relieving the effects of the Depression?

G: I don't know if it did anything much to relieve the Depression. It was just—It bound to help some, of course. But like, I would send twenty-five dollars home, or the government would send twenty-five dollars of my money home, and that would help my dad and mom to buy food and clothing for the other children. It helped. Sure, it was a great help. But what was so heartbreaking was—I didn't realize it at the time, and my mother, of course, like I told you in the beginning, she cried when I left home. She thought I'd never be back, maybe, and I'd never been away from home like that before, and she hadn't experienced nothing like that. And it was heartbreaking to her. And 'course when I come home, she's more than glad to see me of course. All of them. Dad, all of them, for that matter. And occasionally, they wouldn't have to spend all my money, and I'd get five or ten dollars. And that was a pocket full of money. But when I was in Utah, when we got paid, we got paid in silver. We got paid five silver dollars. You might get, once in a while you might get one paper dollar. But most of it is big silver dollars.

37:52 K: Do you think, um, the CCC helped the economy of the local area?

G: Yeah yeah, sure. Mm-hmm. It had to, it had to. It helped people pay their store accounts. In other words, sometimes the merchant would carry a family for a year, for a year, you know, depending on the tobacco crop, or so and so forth. And 'course, after a few years, when things begin to pick up, they got a little more out of their crops, and then come along when I remember going with my dad to sign up, during the Depression, to raise just so much tobacco. You'd be allotted so much. And that's when the price started going up, instead of everybody just raising all they could raise when they couldn't sell it. When you could just raise so much, why, the price started up. But no doubt, there's no question in my mind. I was young at that time, and I didn't realize what the economy was, or—I just know we's in hard times. And I mean sure enough hard times. But people survived, and that was all they had, and they didn't look forward to nothing else. And we were, what we had to eat, mostly we raised it. And that is all you had. You didn't look for anything else. If something different come in to eat, or—Most of the time for years there, we didn't have any biscuit for breakfast. I don't guess I was the only one either. There's lots of families in that shape during that time. A pan of biscuits would've looked like gold settin' on the table to us children. I remember when my mother would make a, when peaches would get ripe and she'd get enough to buy enough sugar to make a big peach cobbler, ohhh, we'd eat like pigs.

K: [laughs]

40:02 K: Well, in general, what do you consider to be the greatest contribution of the CCC?

G: I guess the greatest contribution, I believe, it kept young men from moonshining, and no doubt kept a lot of them from having trouble with other people, because they were away. There was lots of troublemakers that they picked up in the community and they shipped them off, and they were somewhere else making trouble, I guess. But it relieved the community to see somebody that was always a troublemaker or getting into trouble go. That was one of the contributions. I would say—And it's a great contribution, too, to help. Even a teenage boy didn't have no way of making no money back then. Five dollars, he had five dollars, and five dollars would buy something back at that time. You could have a, you could go and spend a lot and not spend it all during that time. It was a great help. Bound to be. But like I said, I was young, and I didn't realize all that was going on, but I can look back now and see, it was a great help. It helped me, and it helped my parents, yes.

K: Do you think the CCC made a difference in the military during World War II?

G: Nah, I doubt that very much, because we didn't have any military training in there. All the training you had in there towards anything was—At a certain time, there'd be retreat, you'd get out when the bugle blowed, you'd go and stand at attention when the flag was going up or going down. And that's the only—And you'd march back to your barracks. That's the only thing as far as military we had in CCC camp. I wouldn't think it contributed anything towards the military, no. We had Army officers most of the time was our officers. They were from the Army. But we didn't contribute—To me, I would say no.

42:12 K: Were there any problems that you could see in the CCC, you know, in general as a program, or specifically at Mammoth Cave?

G: Yes. Occasionally, one or two times—I know one time in particular, we weren't getting enough to eat. And we went on strike one morning. Just didn't have nothing to eat for breakfast hardly. And we got tired of it. And when they blowed the whistle for everybody to fall out, we just stayed in the barracks. And they assured us they would come to find out what the problem was, and they assured us that from then on we would get more to eat. And what you would get a lot of times would be a mash spuds, and then they'd make spud patties, uh, fry them. You know, take mash potatoes and make patties out of them, fry it for breakfast. And then you would get a half a pint of milk for breakfast, and a banana, sometimes. And sometimes you wouldn't get no banana. And you would take this half a pint of milk, and we had—what we ate out of were our mess kits. Aluminum tray with a handle on it that you could fasten on your belt and carry it with you. And the cup was the same way. And you ate out of this mess kit, and you washed it yourself. And carried it back to your barracks. And some mornings, lots of mornings, I'd take light bread and tear it up in small pieces, put sugar over that, and pour milk over it, and that was my cereal. That was my dessert for breakfast. And a lot of times that's all you had except if you had a banana. And occasionally you might get a small box of corn flakes or grape nut flakes. And when I was out in Utah, the milk you got was canned milk. Pet milk. And I believe you take one little can of pet milk and pour it in a gallon jug, and then fill it with water, and make a gallon of milk out of it. That was our milk there. But when we was over here at CCC camp, the milk all came in glass bottles at that time, with a paper top. And didn't have no—Well, we had electricity, but we didn't have no deep freezes or anything. They had ice boxes, and the ice truck

would come every day and deliver ice for the meat—where they kept the meat in store, in other words.

45:06 K: Were there any other problems in the camps that you can remember?

G: No, that was the biggest problem that I can remember. I got along with everybody good.

K: What did you do after you left?

G: I come home to the farm, and bought a little piece of land. Bought forty-three acres. And it was all in woods. I started working, I cleared it up and built a little house and married. And then in 1940, I, in November I believe it was, but in 1940, I put out two acres tobacco. I didn't have no allotment. It cost me so much money to sell that tobacco in order to get an allotment. And I believe the next year I got one-tenth of allotment. Then Congress passed a law in a year or so after that. Everybody who didn't have an acre would get an acre. But during that time, I decided I would go and find me a job. I left home, left, and went to Louisville, and from Louisville I went to Charlestown, Indiana, to work at the powder plant. I worked during the bigger part of World War II. And I remember the morning—I was on the midnight shift—I was on the three to twelve shift in other words, four to twelve. Second shift. And I was in the bed, hadn't gotten up on Sunday morning, when one of my friends came by and told me to get up, we was at war. Pearl Harbor had been bombed. And I never did have to go to the service. I had a family, and I passed my examination, was waiting, and they passed the law, anybody that was twenty-six and by a certain time, didn't have to go, and that exempted me. I thought I was going. A time or two. That's the only thing that kept me out.

47:22 K: And when did you move back in this area?

G: Uh, I guess in '48, 1948 we did.

K: You been here ever since?

G: Uh-huh. In this same, well right in this community. I have a farm. I bought three farms, and they're all adjoined. They all connect together. And um, we've been living here, and we built this home about eighteen, twenty year ago. We've been living here this time. But, it's about three-quarters of a mile from where I first built. This is more convenient over here than it was over there where the other place.

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

G: Well really I—On the last, before I was discharged, as we was working, and some of the other men had to leave that was older, I went to work one morning with the detail, and Mr. Cox, Perry Cox, he was a local man. He was a foreman. And he told me I was gonna be promoted to assistant leader. And that's thirty-six dollars a month, you know. [chuckles] And then the leader, he got forty-five dollars. And you had a leader to each barracks, and assistant leader. So I was made an assistant leader for a month and a half or so before I was discharged. And you didn't have to do any work when you were assistant leader. You just helped other men, showed them what to do. But I hated to leave. I had all the buddies I'd got acquainted with, and we all had good times. But when I had to go, I just moved out, and then I worked on the farm for some of the neighbors, and farmed some myself until I went and got a public job.

K: Do you still keep in touch with some of the guys you met in the CCC?

G: Uh, some of them I do, yes. I got in touch with one, I saw one at the funeral home here some time ago, and he didn't know me. Curtis Mills. And I asked someone, I said, "Is that Curtis Mills?" He said, "Yes." I went and spoke to him. He said, "Well who are you?" Over the years you forget. But there was some resemblance about him that I remembered him. I'm almost sure that's who it was. And we had a good long talk about times we'd spent together. And there's so many of the others. Some of them went off to the war and got killed, you know. I'd hear about it. And some of them have died of natural causes, and some I've never got to see that I would really love to see. And this CCC camp, CCC, Civilian Conservation Corps, the members, they have a get-together, or have had for the last two or three years, but I've never gotten to go to one. Maybe I will sometime. I could see some of the boys that I was with. I believe it would be something worthwhile to visit and talk with them.

K: Well thank you very much.

G: It's been a pleasure.

[CONCLUSION OF INTERVIEW]