

8-13-1987

Interview with Albert "Shorty" Coats Regarding CCC (FA 81)

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TRANSCRIPT

RECORDING NO.: Tape 2 Side AandB

INTERVIEWER: Kelly Lally

INTERVIEWEE: Mr. Shorty Coats

DATE OF INTERVIEW: 8/13/1987

PLACE OF INTERVIEW: Cave City, KY

OTHER PEOPLE PRESENT: There is an additional interviewer, not identified on the tape.

EQUIPMENT USED:

AMOUNT OF RECORDING (TAPE/MINIDISK) USED: 42:05

DESCRIPTION OF CONTENTS:

TRANSCRIBED BY: Dean Jacobson **DATE:** July 31, August 1, 2007

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

KEY: K=Kelly Lally
S=Mr. Shorty Coats
U=Unknown male interviewer

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 Cave City, Kentucky with Mr. Shorty Coats. Today is August the 13th 1987. When you were born, Mr. Coats?

S: I was born in January the six—January the twenty-first, 1916.

K: And where did you grow up?

S: Right here at Mammoth Cave.

K: Um, how many brothers and sisters do you have?

S: Uh, there were twelve in the family.

K: What number were you out of that bunch?

S: I was the seventh one.

K: The seventh one//

S: Yeah.

0:40 K: What did your family do for a living?

S: Oh dad worked at the cave. He was a cook at the hotel. Worked there 40 years. And until I was a good-sized boy, we lived within 300 yards of the entrance of the cave. 'Cause we were just in the back of the hotel; you know where those motels are just in the back of the—

K: Mm-hmm.

S: Out there by that Old Guide Cemetery—

K: Uh huh.

S: Right there we was a—One of them motels was in our *yard*.

1:16 K: Well um, so you lived there when the park was being developed? The whole family did?

S: Oh yes. He moved there. He built him a house there; he was working at the cave, started working there when he was sixteen years old.

K: Mm-hmm.

S: And I believe they paid him twelve dollars a month. And he had to get out. He lived over, up the river.

K: Mm-hmm.

S: Joined the cave I mean dad's land joined the cave.

K: Oooooh.

S: And- but he had to walk down the narrows along the river.

K: Mm-hmm.

S: He left at three o'clock, get down to the cave and build a fire in a kitchen stove, had it ready to go at four. So they decided they'd build him a little house in the back of the hotel there, right close. So that's why I was there. He- he was- he lived on the estates property.

2:06 K: What were times like for your family during the Depression?

S: Rough.

K: [unintelligible]

S: Big family, yes, so it was hard to get food. But he worked at the cave quite a bit. Not regularly, but enough that we got by. We didn't starve [chuckles].

2:27 K: How old were you when the CCC came into the area? [Long pause] Did you join right when it started or //

S: Oh no, I had a brother join right when it started-

K: Mm-hmm.

S: His was—come in '33.

K: Yeah.

S: And uh, then I joined in '37.

K: '37 Um, did you have to sign up any particular place or since you lived so close did you just go and—

S: No, we had go sign up at Cave City – it was kind of political. And uh, the man that run a store in Cave City, if you trade with him, why, he'd let you walk over and sign with the CC's, that's about the ra... that's the racket, don'tcha [laughs] //

K: [laughs]

S: So we- we trade with him, and I signed up.

K: Uh huh

S: 'Course twenty-five dollars went home to buy food, and I used all of that five bucks a month [laughs].

3:24 K: How did you spend your five dollars?

S: I bought cigarettes and candy and junk like that. 'Course they fed good, that's the best food ever- I'd ever eaten, was CC... 'course it was Army grub's what it was, first-class grub, you can't beat it.

K: So what camp were you in?

S: I was in uh, five sixteen on the north side of the river, which uh, was referred to as "number four"- there were four camps come in the area.

K: Uh huh. And you say you went in in '35 did you say? Or thirty //

S: No, '37.

K: Thirty-seven. And how long did you stay in?

S: I stayed in *almost* two years. Two years was the limit when I wa- was in but- I wanted to work at the cave as a seasonal guide, so they let me out a little early.

K: Okay.

S: I didn't stay- I've forgotten- seemed like it was twenty-one months or something like that. And uh, I got out, done seasonal guide job.

K: Right after that.

S: Yeah.

K: Well what- what work project did you work on when you were in the CCC?

4:26 S: Oh I worked in the cave.

K: What did you do in the cave?

S: I was fall out and police up. (laughs) We policed the area. Cleaned the boats.

K: Do you have any //

S: The bridges.

K: Mm-hmm.

S: See, there was about a half mile of bridge walk there- close to half a mile of bridge work. I mean that the river would rise- every time the river rise seven feet it'd be over that *board walk*, and that was to be cleaned. And I've cleaned that a many a time. And I done that before I went in the CC's, too. But it- they'd pay us two bucks a day- two bucks a- yeah, two bucks a day for that. But it didn't rise too often, but they got in a big hurry to get it off, and that was in the summer time.

5:16 K: Were all the trails already finished by the time you got in? Did you have anything to do with the making of the trails?

S: Oh, building the trails?

K: Uh huh.

S: No, they were still building trails. I was in that- group. My supervisor was trail building.

K: Uh huh.

S: But uh they were about eight of us on clean-up detail.

K: Mm-hmm.

S: So that's what I done.

5:40 K: Was it mainly- uh- men from camp number four that worked in the cave? Or were there were there any from other camps that//

S: Strictly number four.

K: And aside from the eight on the clean-up detail, do you remember how many total were in the cave- working or—

S: Seemed like it was a group of about twenty on trail building.

K: M hm. So there- there were clean up uh, crew, and there was trail building, was there anything else that you all did in the cave? Um [long pause]

S: Well they explored the new discovery in about '37 and uh... the police up detail for about two or three months. Ah, maybe two months. We was digging out a small passageway that'd filled with silt. And that's one of the ways of ex—running in some new caves, digging that silt out, so you got //

K: Ooooh //

S: // get through, and we done that for a while.

6:45 K: Did you- did you work anywhere else besides in the cave while you were in the CCC?

S: No.

K: Always in the cave?

S: Strictly caves. See, I was working in the cave- I was working in the cave before I went in the CC's- summer season only. It was July and August. They called us “trailers,” and we trailed the groups, cleaned lamps—sometimes we'd have to go clean those bridges, too, when the river would rise. That was another trailer's detail until the CC's come in, and when they come in they got that uh- bridge clean.

K: Did they put you to work in the cave because they knew you had experience there?

S: Yes, that was the idea.

7:30 K: 'kay. Let's see. Well we went through a lot of these real fast [laughs]. Um. Is there any way you could describe a typ- uh, typical day for you as far as, you know, getting up in the morning, and, you know, what time you did what- working or—

U: Did they have reveille like they did in the Army, Shorty?

S: [long pause] Sss- I believe they did have. Yeah, that's the only way they had of keeping up with all of 'em, they'd have to //

K: [laughs]

S: // have- they'd have to report the number of- uh, people- see, we were- we 're in barracks, and I was in barracks number two and- our barracks leader w- we'd all file out and line up there and he'd report the number of people that- of CC's were in li- in line there.

8:19 K: Then everybody'd go to work. Did you come back for lunch, or did they have lunch for you there?

S: No, we- well we'd actually- that- reveille we'd- eat breakfast. And they'd have our food ready in the poke sack //

K: M hm

S: // for the- for the police up boys. 'Course now the clean u- I mean the building crew, they'd bring in food for them //

K: M hm

S: // from- from the CC camp. 'Course we ate- our lunch would usually be baloney sausage 'n- that round hook cheese. [unintelligible] [laugh]

K & U: [laugh]

S: That wasn't bad in them days, but it taste pretty good.

8:57 K: And what time did you get off work in the afternoon? [long pause] Do you remember?

S: I believe we had to be out of the cave at four o'clock to be brought back to camp.

K: M hm

S: We ate lunch at- I ate dinner at five.

K: And was the rest of the time after that your free time?

S: Yes.

K: In the evening? Did- what did you do with your free time in the evenings or on the weekends?

S: Oh the evening, see, there was nowhere to go. It was all wooded area just like it is now.

K: M hm.

S: 'Cause they'd moved all the people out. And I'd just take it easy. On the weekends I'd come home. Because, see we lived- we lived right across in that little shack over there.

K: Were um—

S: So if we weren't on fire detail, why, you'd get a pass and come home. Sometimes I'd sneak off and get caught [laughs] I had to do KP on the weekends there!

9:58 K: [laughs] What were you doing when you got caught, and did you sneak off to find some girls? [laughs] //

S: Well—yeah, there’d always be a lot- lot of ‘em. Lotta kids around this area because //

K: uh huh. Did many of the guys date local girls?

S: There wasn’t that many. A few did.

10:18 K: Uh huh. What did you do when you were on fire detail?

S: Well if they had a fire in the area, they’d call us out, and we’d get on the truck, go up, put that fire out.

K: Did you have to stay in camp on those weekends when you were—

S: On fire detail? Yes.

K: M hm.

S: Supposed to, but a lot of times I went out and didn’t get caught! Some I did!

K: [laughs] Ooooh. What’d you have to do if you got KP?

S: Same as the GI do- same- same principle as the GI. Wash dishes, clean- clean the mess hall, junk like that.

10:57 K: Did you participate in any of the um—the organized recreational activities, the sports teams, or things like that?

S: They didn’t have too much of it.

K: M hm.

S: Be on the week on- a weekend or two, we uh- we’d play ball- play softball. And one time they had a test on to see who could kick the football the farthest. And about the smallest guy in the outfit kicked it the farthest because he- he was a real athlete. But I kicked it the- a little better than that, which uh- I kicked it forty-nine feet. About the first time I ever kicked one, //

K: [laughs] //

S: but I said “why, I can kick one anyway, 60 or 70 feet, but I missed it some.

11:58 K: Did you ever participate in any of the education programs that // the camp

S: Yeah, I took typing.

K: Typing? Did you take that- was it in the evenings or on the weekends or //

S: In the evenings.

U: That help you when you got the job at the Parks Service, to- [unintelligible] //

S: I never did use that typing //

U: Never did use it?

K: [laughs]

S: No. No, I was jus- just what you were: a storyteller.

K & U: [laughs]

K: Did you go into- to Cave City much for movies or any other activities?

S: Yeah. They would haul us- they- they- they'd load a truck, haul me into town, see a movie for a dime.

12:41 K: What about the- the recreation center- the Whoopie House, did they have that built yet—when you were there?

S: No. I was gone, I believe, when they had built- they were building it.

K: M hm

S: But they didn't have it finished until I got out. But I went to the Hoopee House some after I got out because I was local here.

K: Oh, yeah. Did uh- did the different camps here or at Mammoth Cave, you know, one through four, did they have much to do with each other? Did they interact very much, the guys in each of the camps?

S: No.

13:23 U: You ever have any dealings with the black camp? Number one? Did you ever work with any of those crews or //

S: No.

U: fire details or—They didn't plug together in the fields then [unintelligible] //

S: No.

U: // [unintelligible] fire or something?

S: No. No, they uh [long pause] Now they worked in the cave most of the time, that was their- detail, was building the trails.

K: M hm.

U: Oh. So that- so there were two cay- two camps then involved with the cave, four and- and number one //

S: Well number one had it until uh- I- I went in //

K: M hm

S: CC's, and since I was uh- familiar with policing the trails and so on.

K: M hm

S: Why they put it over at number four.

U: I see.

14:09 K: Um—how did the white people in the area feel about the presence of blacks in the camp nearby? Was there any racial tension in- at all—around here?

S: No, no. We—there was more cave niggers than there was *white* niggers. [laughs]

K & U: [laughs]

S: “White cave niggers!” Because the guides [unintelligible]- I mean ninety percent of them were black.

K: M hm.

S: And I was raised up where there more blacks than there were whites. Right around the cave area there.

K: So everybody got along pretty well?

S: Oh yes.

14:45 K: Was your father still working in the cave while you were in the CCC?

S: Well see he- he'd cook in the hotel //

K: Oh, he was a cook //

S: Yeah //

K: I'm sorry, that's right, I forgot about that.

S: He did uh—He did work at number two- I mean at number one.

K: M hm.

S: With them blacks.

K: M hm.

S: There had to be, uh, two guides with every crew of blacks working, building the trails.

K: M hm.

S: And uh, course he'd worked here all his life, and they got him a job for about a year. So-working—

K: Working with number one?

S: Working with number one. Yeah. And that's the reason he got in- got that job [dog barks] as a- baby-sitting the Indian. [laughs]

15:35 K: Will you tell me about that? When- when did they find the Indian? Do you remember?

S: Found him in 1930- was it '37?

U: I was- I [unintelligible] '35, '36 and '37, I don't know, I //

S: I can't remember now, that- that slipped my mind.

U: I think it was '35, wasn't it? Was it that early or was it '36?

S: [long pause] Oh, the CC's were in- the CC's were working into that black- one of the black crews. Uh- was working along where the Indian was found and—a guide- see the two- had two guides and one of the guides was searching for a good deposit of clay to spread along the trail. See then they built clay trails instead of cement trails- and he was up on that cliff section, and found that Indian. With that- I mean- it was in '35 I guess, wasn't it?

U: I believe it was '35.

S: Yeah.

U: Was it Lyman or Grover that found the Indian, or were both of 'em back there? Wasn't it Lyman Cutlet and Grover //

S: Yeah, Lyman Cutlet and Grover Camel. They were the two guides with that particular group.

U: Uh huh.

S: And they were up on that cliff section, Mummy Ledge, and discovered him under the rock.

16:54 K: And so they had your dad come in?

S: Well, a- after they uh- found him, why they- they got to thinking somebody might come in and disturb the situation. So they put guides as night watchmens there. Roy Estes was one of the guides, you knew Roy, didn't you-

U: M hm.

S: He was one of the guides that stayed there. And dad was the other one that stayed- well, they were twelve hours, I guess. Time didn't mean much in those days. When I started workin' at the cave, you'd go to work at eight o'clock and come home when you got off. Sometimes I'd get a three o'clock all day trip and get out at- I hadn't got out as late as eleven o'clock at night.

K: Mm.

S: Now I would already've made a Echo River trip in the mornings and then make that all day trip in the afternoon- same money: two bucks a day. And I was tickled to death, you work seven days a week, right along- ah- no time off.

18:02 K: What did the- um- the local residents around here, you know, you were brought up around here, what'd they think about the CCC being in- in the area?

S: Ah the CC's didn't go over too good. They felt it was a waste of money. And which it was. What they were doing, except for the cave, now, 'cause they was out in the forest, doin' this and doin' that, just working, now they worked you. If you didn't work, they'd send you home. I'd seen several guys get sent home 'cause they wouldn't work.

K: M hm. Did uh- Was there any trouble between the local residents and any of the CCC guys or just didn't have much to do with each other? Or //

S: Well- didn't have too much to do with each other. I know- one of my friends got cut with a knife by the- by a CC's boy. Cut- why, I think he had a hundred and some stitches. 'Cause he raped him good. [laughs] Back in those days they'd knife you in a minute.

19:03 K: Well- what did people think about you being a CCC boy- around the area since you were also, you know, pretty well known? I mean, you were, you know, a local resident, too. Did you have any problems with that?

S: Oh no. Now that was just tow boys fighting // [unintelligible]

K: M hm. Yeah.

S: We had a little party down here about uh- halfway down to the cave in a man's house- you know, just- and uh, four or five CC boys come and because there were a bunch of girls there //

K: Uh huh

S: So- you know how that goes. Did you ever- did you ever make them honky-tonk joints?

K: [laughs]

S: Rough joints? You [noise, unintelligible]- you

K: Uh huh

S: So that is the same principle, there.

19:50 K: Were a lot of local residents, by the time you got in the CCC, were they still upset about the park bein' developed? Uh, with the government taking their land and stuff?

S: Lot of people were, I guess //

K: Still upset? M hm.

S: 'Cause they took it for nothin' and uh- that was uh- people's home- makes a lot of difference.

K: M hm.

S: I mean my dad had a little property on- over on- right near the Mammoth Cave School, and they give him twenty bucks an acre. [laughs] There was already a fence, had the buildings on it. Nothin' fancy, but //

K: M hm.

S: // shoulda been worth more than twenty bucks an acre.

K: That must've been hard for him having to work in the cave and- and- while the park was being developed when he's- you know, he's sorta like on both sides- he's on both sides.

S: Well—he just had to take it, that was all, he- he'd- had always worked at the cave so he- he could've uh- held out on selling that property and got forty bucks an acre, because some people did—they'd uh – they'd hold out and they'd have to condemn it. Well, when they condemned it, why, they'd give 'em forty bucks an acre.

K: M.

S: So he'd a gotten twice the money. But he was workin' there, and he had to go along with it, he thought, so he did.

21:16 K: Did he still live, um, right around the cave? Did they let him still live there, um-

S: Oh no, no. They said they were goin' to to begin with, but they'll tell you anything to get an option on your land. Hell, they started taking options on that land in 1926.

K: Mm.

U: When did they move you off the old estate- what year did you have to move off of there?

S: '32.

U: '32. Did they make you move?

S: Well, they wanted you to. They kept after you until they did- I mean they finally got everybody out.

U: Did Lewis and them move before y'all did, or about the same time?

S: Well Lewis and them was living on the estate.

U: [Unintelligible]

S: They lived up. [long pause] The visitors' center is in their front yard. [laughs]

K & U: [laughs]

S: I mean, it was.

U: Yeah, I've heard that.

22:16 K: [Long pause] Well, how successful do you feel like the CCC was in relieving the effects of the Depression? Do you think it made a difference?

S: It made an awful lot of difference for- the people were able to participate. Yes thirty- thirty bucks a month was a lot of money. I know a few First World War veterans would get thirty bucks a month for a pension, if they were able to shyster the government out of a pension, they were rich- rich people- there durin'- during the Depression.

22:54 K: What do you think the um- do you think the CCC being in the area helped the local economy at all?

S: The Cave City area made that man rich- that uh- run the cinema or show.

K: Uh huh.

S: 'Cause they'd send eight or ten trucks a week out there, or more. And since they, guys would drop that dime in [laughs] he died a multi-millionaire. 'Course he- he had a little money before then but uh, not a great deal.

23:36 U: You don't reckon politics had anything to do with where they placed the camps, do you? Did they place the camps one side of the river or the other for- for that reason? For business reasons or //

S: No, no. No, they didn't- they didn't think they was gonna help any, which they didn't. They didn't help nobody because that man that run the show, I- I- because they didn't spend money nowhere else.

U: They didn't buy- they didn't go in stores and buy fruit and vegetables, things like that much, they got the food somewhere else?

S: Army furnished it.

24:12 K: Well what- what do you feel like the greatest contribution of the CCC was in general?

S: Oh, they were uh, they helped the forest area, out in the forest section.

K: M hm.

S: And they- ‘course they built the trails in the cave.

K: [long pause] You think it made a big difference in the military for World War II?

S: Yes, yes they did. It helped out. Now they- the CC’s built a—how many miles of trails we got down there? Hiking trails, surface hiking trails.

U: Surface hiking trails, it’d probably fifty, sixty miles of it, I’d say.

S: Close to it, I didn’t know about junk like that slipping by. See I- I haven’t thought too much since I retired //

K & U: [laughs]

S: That’s a fact, you don’t- [laughs] Then I went uh- went through that operation, that was a little rough on me.

U: Yeah.

S: So I forgot a whole lot on that account. Seemed like it was forty miles of trail //

U: Yes, yes [unintelligible] //

S: They built forty miles of trails. And the blacks built the most of them trails. ‘Cause I remember seein’ ‘em scootin’ them wheelbarrows up and down them hills full of- they built them out of *lime* rock, you know. It’s crushed limestone.

25:40 K: What about the- the roads in the area did the CCC help //

S: Oh they built a lot of the trails- I mean a lot of dirt roads- they were dirt roads, and they had one, two, three—They had three or four rock quarries that they worked the guys in. I lucked out, I didn’t have to hit that quarry. That’s hard work //

K: Oh, yeah.

S: // uh, in the lime quarry. Y’see number four had one. I can’t remember whether number two had it or not, and I think the blacks had it- a rock quarry somewhere. And number three, too. I believe they all had a rock quarry. ‘Cause it- they know- you know, the- the much limestone needed- always find a place to blast some limestone, start crushing it.

26:31 K: Did you know if any problems with the CCC, you know, in general, the big program, or specifically in the camp that you worked in? People not getting’ along or um, desertions, did the guides leave or—

S: Oh, there'd be a few leave, but not many. No, they were tickled to death to get that good grub, and uh, twenty-five dollars. Some of the parents didn't need that money. Mine did, mine needed that money. We um, some of 'em, they'd send them some of that money back, and they'd- they helped the bootleggers out quite a little bit because they'd buy moonshine.

K: [laughs] Were there a lot of moonshiners in the area that the CCC boys went to?

S: Yeah. Well, them bootleggers come- come right close to the camp and bootleg that whiskey. Yeah, I-

K: [laughs]

S: My brother-in-law, his dad used to do a lot of moonshining, and bootlegging.

27:35 K: How many brothers did you have working with CCC?

S: I just had one //

K: Just the one, the older one //

S: Yes.

U: That Marty?

S: No, Carlin.

U: Oh

S: You don't know him, he's- he's eighty-five now.

U: [unintelligible]

S: Still kickin' [laughs]

27:51 K: Well what did you do after you got out? When you got out of the CCC?

S: Oh, I started working at the cave as a seasonal.

K: M hm.

S: 'Course, I got laid off the fifteenth of October, I believe. And I- I went to Louisville and started working for Dupont's powder plant over in Charlestown Indiana, about twenty miles out of Louisville. Worked there for two years.

28:24 K: Did you have to- to go anywhere for the war?

S: I went in the Army, stayed three years, three months and seventeen days.

K: [laughs]

S: I pulled time in Africa, and Europe.

K: M hm.

U: You the one caught Lloyd Wells coming out of a house over in Egypt somewhere and then //

S: Naw. Really, I didn't. No, they kid about it //

U: They [unintelligible].

S: Yeah. But he uh- I seen 'im uh- you know the way he'd do things real quick? //

U: Yeah

S: He was turning the GI truck around-

K: [laughs]

U: [unintelligible]

S: And he stayed late there in Africa, we did too, we stayed almost a year. And uh- he was driving one of them six by sixes //

U: [unintelligible]

S: I seen 'im. I- and I seen old uh, another old GI that comes to Mammoth Cave as a guide, Ward. And he was about two-thirds Indian. I remember seeing him in Italy.

U: Huh.

29:21 K: I'm gonna turn the tape over real fast.

29:27 K: This is the second side of the tape of my interview with Mr. Shorty Coats. So after the war, did you come back to this area of the country? Did you come back to //

S: Oh I got out of- I got out of the Army in 1945 and come back here, but it was too late to work seasonal. And I got out in October, I believe, so the season was over.

K: M hm.

S: And I drewed that rockin' chair money- I was glad- I got by very well with that twenty bucks a week- it wasn't bad. And uh- when Spring come, they- they said I could work as a seasonal guide, so I started working as a seasonal guide and worked from then on, 'til '50- let's see, when did I get out permanent- I've forgotten when I got on permanent, but I worked- seemed like it's '49. I was a seasonal help until '49, from '46 to '49 I was a seasonal guide.

K: M hm.

S: It seemed like it - fifteen July I got on permanent. Been there- stayed there- near about close to 40 years.

30:41 K: What did you do as a permanent? Work on the same thing- type?

S: Just storytelling. Well I- after I got on permanent I didn't- no I don't believe I had to do any bridge cleaning or like that.

K: So you took people through-

S: I took people through the cave, yes.

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

S: [long pause] Can't remember nothing, maybe there is something, but I don't know what.

31:27 K: Oh, I forgot to ask you: do- did many of the CCC boys play pranks on each other in the camps, do you remember?

S: Yes, one of them played a prank, was- he lay down on the bed and went to sleep – they'd hotfoot, put a lot a //

K: [laughs]

S: polish on your shoe and set it afire, man that'd burn you up!

K: [laughs]

S: You got that [unintelligible] I- they'd pull that trick on me.

K: [laughs]

U: [unintelligible]

S: You'd get that shoe off real quick.

32:00 K: [laughs] Somebody was tellin' me about making some of these new guys guard the flag pole with a broomstick- he was- somebody told me about that, I think that was camp number two [laughs] [unintelligible].

S: Well yeah, maybe they did. They done- they- they pulled several tricks, but see I wasn't- I wasn't with them too much, I strictly stayed in the cave.

K: M hm. What the- What year did you retire from working, uh-

S: At the cave?

K: Uh huh.

U: 1980, 'cause that was my first year up here.

S: 1980, that's right.

K: Wow, you were in there for a long time.

S: Yeah, I had [long pause] say, I was sixty-five, that's why I retired.

K: M hm.

S: And there's not too many guides- that last that long. Because of the radon, that's what it is.

K: M hm.

S: That's one of the things. Possibly. Shortly after I quit, I could tell my lungs wasn't right. Oh I start spitting up blood, coughing up blood. [long pause]. And when we was in the CC's we were digging that- trying to dig into some new cave and diggin' in that sand and clay, no circulation no, not of- wasn't good circulation at all. Why you would feel that real bad. I know one of the CC's that I was sleeping next to, he said "Boy, you got TB!" I got a real rust cough. I said "no I- none of my people have uh- died of TB, I don't have TB." But I did have a bad cough, no joking, and now I'm pretty sure that that's what it was. 'Course then, after stayin' in that cave for forty years it-

K: Your body got used to it.

S: Well, no //

K: It got worse.

S: You- you get lung *cancer*. I know one man that lived in Salts Cave for twelve years. He stayed in there. Day and night. He loved the cave area. He's out of New York- he was a civil engineer out of New York- and- 'course he had to do something to get by, I think they said he moonshined a bit. Uh-

U: What was his name, Shorty?

34:21 S: Turner.

U: Turner?

S: Yeah. You know Turner, don'tcha? //

U: [unintelligible]

S: I mean you've heard- heard the name.

U: Yeah. Ed- was it Ed Turner or- what was his- what was his first name? Bill Turner? I can't remember his first name.

S: No, I can't remember it either.

U: Was it same one connected with the Great Onyx?

S: Yeah, yeah. //

U: Yeah.

S: See, he- he discovered the Great Onyx Cave from Salt's Cave which is- Salt's Cave is about- on the surface is about four or five miles, is seems to be, but, pretty close to four miles. And all he traveled underground from the Salt's cave into the Great Onyx.

K: Wow.

S: He could come up at one time on- on our place, back there on the ridge where we had a- had a place, because he told my mother- said now, "I come up right there, come out to surface, and cause a little sinkhole. And uh- and went on discovered Onyx Cave. But he- he described it thoroughly how he covered that- he covered that with a big sand rock about that big. And put white oak poles under it so it wouldn't scoot- you know-

U: Right.

S: break the dirt loose and scoot down in there.

U: You mean he covered up that sinkhole that way.

S: He covered that sinkhole that way. And I guess he put dirt on it, but, when I went to look- my mother told that tale- and I went to look and I said "well that is the truth. That old man was tellin' the truth." 'Cause them white oak poles is still there. They was about- uh- cut from white oak sapling about "that" big. And white oak don't rot too fast.

36:03 U: Wonder if that's ever fallen in now.

S: Oh, they covered it up. I told that tale and they, cave outfit covered it up. Cave research group anyway. //

U: Cave research //

S: I'm sure that they were. 'Cause I looked for it three or four times after I told up- told them that tale, and- couldn't find it.

U: Well did Edwards block off the passageway between Great Onyx and Salt's?

S: Yeah.

U: 'Cause it's supposed to be not a way to do that anymore – not supposed to be a way to get from Great Onyx to Salt's.

S: Oh yes, he was a sharper, old man Edwards was.

U: So he blocked it- did he ever tell you that he blocked it off?

S: No, no. No, but I know he did because uh- Turner said that's the way he got in there- was through Salt's. And uh- he was supposed to get half the cave for exploring – discovering and exploring it. 'Course Edwards sharped him out of that. Edwards wanted to marry his daughter. See he had two- two daughters. And the young- the youngest one they wanted Turner to marry. Well Turner was already married, and he wouldn't do it. And uh, they chased him off. I remember when he come from the Onyx Cave, he come by our house just in back of the hotel there- went over, stayed with Joe Lee—his wife was Sarah Anne. We called her “Aunt Sarah Anna.” She was a midwife, and you know, kind of a country- country doctor.

U: Uh huh

S: And he went over there and got [unintelligible] wanted her to doctor him up. And while he was there, he- he stayed three months- he got bedfast and laid down and died. But that- They called it TB then- 'cause they wouldn't know a cancer from TB. But he- I know he got that cancer from that radon in Salt's Cave.

K: M.

S: And some of the guys, they were- they liked to kid me, some of them older guys'd—I know the- a lot of tales that they didn't think I would remem- would even hear [unintelligible]. But I stayed right- I live right there at the cave. And uh, they got Turner's picture. And say “here is one thing that you don't know. Who is that?” And- and I said “that's Harry Bush.” But I knowed it too old to be Harry Bush 'cause Harry Bush went to school when I did. And he was a son of that daughter they wanted Turner to marry.

U: [unintelligible]

38:38 S: And little Roe, you know him, didn't you-

U: Right.

S: He kinda in l- one time got in- was in love with that girl. I said “I didn't know it was Turner,” but I said “boy it looks like Harry Bush, I guarantee you it does. Just exactly.” 'Course that tickled them guides to death, they- they knew the story, too.

U: Right.

S, K & U: [laughs]

S: But little Roe made him mad as the devil because he didn't want nobody talking about that girl.

S, K & U: [laughs]

S: But I- I thought it was how- I mean it looked exactly like Harry Bush, see, then they told me the story. //

U: [unintelligible]

S: I'd heard something like- something about that, but I didn't know what it was. I- but I could see the connections there after they said "well that's Turner."

39:27 K: You still go out to the cave very often? //

S: Not too much, I stay away from there. I don't need to be in the cave. And uh, I'd like to go in, but— So that's one of the guides- uh- which I'm almost positive that died with that radon cancer, // and

U: [unintelligible]

S: another one was Bill Bradford, he- he spent about forty, fifty years in Mammoth Cave, and when he was seventy-two- he died at seventy-two, but he retired when he was seventy. Didn't have to retire then, but they- he got disabled, went home and his lungs started bleeding. And uh- of course, they didn't know it then, but they called it TB. And that's another one of them guides- cave people that died without just all- couldn't prove it, but I was almost positive.

40:22 U: You know, a lot of 'em out there now say "well a lot of them old guides didn't gui- didn't die with uh- lung disease, they died with a- a heart-attack or somethin'. But there are some according to you that did die with some kind of a lung disorder.

S: Yeah. That's two I know of.

U: I was thinking of the Bradfords, I mean were any of the Bradfords in the three C's that you know of?

S: Well, uh- some of the younger ones were. Because when the CC's come, they wanted to get rid of the blacks as guides because they drank too much, and were hard to control and so on.

U: M.

S: And uh- they shifted them younger blacks, two of- two of the Bradfords went in the CC's. And then when the CC's was over, they- their job was gone.

41:08 U: Yeah. Well they- any of them still livin' in this area or are all of them dead?

S: I don't know. There's one still livin' but he lives in Cincinnati, I believe.

U: There's still some Bradfords over 'round Glasgow, I didn't know if any of them were—

S: Well, they're descendants from //

U: Descendants, but they're not the ones—

S: No. I don't know of a one over there that's still living. Yeah, two of them Bradfords that went in the CC's, why, one of them died in Glasgow, he went to Glasgow and he died there. Then that one that's still living lives in- I believe it's Cincinnati.

K: I'm gonna turn the tape off.

U: Thanks a lot, shorty.

S: Mm hm.

K: Thank you, Shorty. I appreciate it.

[CONCLUSION OF INTERVIEW]