

My name is Vernon Wells. I live at 4113 Fitzgerald Court in Erlanger, Kentucky. I am retired from the Federal Bureau of Alcohol, Tobacco and Firearms, U.S. Treasury Department after some forty-one years of public service. The first nine years of which were spent working in the Mammoth Cave Park area. I understand that an oral history is being assembled and filed at Mammoth Cave Park Headquarters, having to do with the early days of the park. and that some taped interviews have been made with people who formerly lived there and during the thirties and--ah--were residents of the park, but that no such interviews nor taped narratives have been made or obtained from persons that worked in the park back in those early days.

I worked at Mammoth Cave, in fact, I was one of the first park rangers, from May of 1933 until February of 1942, and--ah--it is about my years there and the events that I participated in, or know about, that I wish to put on this tape. I especially would like to talk about the years commencing in-- May of 1933 through 1936, which--ah--, I refer to as the violent years. The years that were quite critical to Mammoth Cave becoming a national park.

I arrived in the park which was then a proposed national park in May of 1933 among the first contingent of enrollees of the Civilian Conservation Corps. We established the first--ah--such camp in the park area. It was located on Flint Ridge at the site of the long abandoned Bluegrass Country Club, which had been a project--ah--promoted and developed by the L & N Railroad Company as I recall. But it had not been successful and had been abandoned some years before we arrived there. Several of the buildings were still standing, mostly log buildings. But they were so deteriorated that we could not use them immediately, so for a time we lived in tents. The buildings--ah--, some of them were restored to the point where they/we could use them as barracks and for other purposes. Within several months thereafter three other camps were established. Number 2 Camp was established at New Entrance, Number 3 Camp at Joppa and Number 4 Camp on the north side of Green River at Cade. These four camps were under the supervision and control of the Army. That is the

camp life itself, the housing, and--ah-- food, medical care, discipline were all controlled by the, by the Army.

The work projects were handled by an organization created during the depression years called the Emergency Conservation Works, ECW. The ECW had control of all the--ah-- work projects and control of the enrollees outside of the camp. There was a general ECW superintendent who had an office at Mammoth Cave in a building that was later expanded, and for many years became park headquarters. And there he had a staff of clerical personnel, support personnel, also a staff of engineers--ah--later and there was--ah--a couple of foresters eventually and--ah--a naturalist and a geologist. But all these people worked for the--ah--ECW.

Projects were developed and--ah--carried to completion by the enrollees. Each camp had its own ECW superintendent and a contingent of foremen. And these foremen were in immediate charge of the enrollees and their work projects. The policies and plans were under the general control, supervision of the National Park Service.

The--ah--National Park Service had a representative on the scene, he hadn't been there very long, just a few months, when this first camp was established. His name was Robert P. Holland of New York. Mr. Holland, a West Pointer, had served--ah--some time in the military before joining the National Park Service. He was a permanent employee who had worked in some of the parks along the east coast. As I recall, Colonial National Historical Park was one of them. And he had been sent down there to represent the National Park Service. Mr. Holland was a/an outstanding man. His father was a well-known, internationally known, conservationist and--ah--outdoors man, and at that time and for quite a number of years, he was editor of the *Field and Stream Magazine*.

Mr. Holland's assignment was to serve as liaison between the National Park Service and the Kentucky National Park Commission and the Mammoth Cave National Park Association and to--ah--do everything possible to expedite the

establishment of the park. Mammoth Cave Park had been in the making for many, oh, quite a number of years. Two organizations, The Kentucky National Park Commission and the Mammoth Cave National Park Association had been--ah--in the process of trying to establish a national park there for some time. They had, of course, acquired the Mammoth Cave itself, and the new entrance and--ah--some of the land within the park; but there was a long way to go. And Mr. Holland's task was to hasten the establishment of the park in every way possible.

We had only been there just a few weeks when Mr. Holland came to Number 1 Camp one day to get the help of--ah--couple of enrollees. He needed--ah--help in developing information determining the conditions within the park and I was fortunate to have been picked, by him, to assist him in his work. A short time later another enrollee by the name of Joseph Ridge was also selected, and he and I formed a team for several years. Thereafter, we worked closely with Mr. Holland.

Joe and I were young, active, and enthusiastic assistants to Mr. Holland. Both of us were young. I was eighteen at the time and Joe was a couple of years older. Little did I know at the time that the next three years would mature me far beyond my age. I would hike many hundred of miles over the park. My backside would be toughened by long hours on horseback. I would be threatened, shot at, shot, and I would water the soil with a great amount of my sweat and some of my blood. But these years were to be some of the most memorable in my entire life.

The first test that Mr. Holland gave to Joe and me was to become acquainted with the park, the land within the boundary. And to locate and identify on the maps--the lands that had already been purchased--and to give him reports daily of the names of the people who resided on park land.

The park area at--at--that time was far far different from what it is today. There were within the boundary, which consisted of some 60,000 acres, about 600 families. It was, it was rather heavily populated for such a large area. Good sized communities such as Joppa, and at--ah--Stockholm around at Ollie, so--ah--they also--ah--had

numerous schools in the park. There were one-room grammar schools in the north district, that operated at White Oak, Little Jordan, at--ah--Maple Springs, at--ah--at Sand--ah--Sand Springs on Collie Ridge and at Ollie. A little later they built the Lincoln School which gave courses beyond the grammar school level. All the other schools were the one-room type that, a that a--had--a grammar schools only. And in the south district, there were schools operated--operating at Lick Log, at Chestnut Grove, at Flint Ridge, at Joppa, at--a--Little Hope, at the Woosly School on the south boundary, H school at Joppa and Silent Grove. There was only one high school in the whole park area and that was at Joppa. But that was a long, long way for most children who lived within the park boundary. So to get an adequate education, the children usually had to leave there and go to some of the surrounding towns. But that was seldom done and--ah--for the most part the children got the benefit of a grammar school education and--ah--that was about it.

There were numerous churches and of course they had their--ah--graveyards. There were general stores, so it was--ah--rather heavily populated really. AH--the people for the most part were descendants of the original settlers who had come into that area in the late 1700s and the early 1800s. They were--ah--an independent--ah--people, very proud, self-reliant, mostly religious people. They--ah--suffered greatly, especially in the north district where they were isolated by--ah--and hemmed in by the Green River and the Nolin River. They suffered greatly from the lack of--ah--good roads and--ah--adequate medical care and educational facilities.

The roads in the park at that time were all dirt roads, except for the paved road from--ah--Cave City to Mt.--ah--to Mammoth Cave Hotel and the gravel road which went to the Great Onyx Cave and to the Crystal Cave. All other roads were--ah--dirt roads and these became impassable for motor vehicles--ah--when it rained and especially in the wintertime, the freezing and thawing--ah--made these roads absolutely impassable for any kind of--ah--motorized vehicle. So these people were--ah--pretty isolated, especially in the wintertime.

Now in the south district, they had better access out to the surrounding towns of Cave City and--ah--Glasgow Junction as it was known as--ah--of then. It is now called Park City and Brownsville. But in the north district, where they were--ah--confined to--ah--small area--ah--with two rivers--ah--hemming them in there, they were pretty well isolated in the wintertime. There was a lawless element in the area, much like there is in any society, and there was a plentiful supply of moonshine whiskey which contributed to the lawlessness. Drunken brawls were common and--ah--which sometimes resulted in injury or death for one or more of the participants. As far as I can remember, there was only one law enforcement officer in the entire park area; and he was a deputy sheriff who was--ah--assigned to the--ah--Mammoth Cave area. He was paid for, as I remember, by the Kentucky National Park Commission; and his responsibility was primarily to--ah--keep order around the Mammoth Cave Hotel and in and in that vicinity.

The people observed no rules as far as the protection of the wildlife was concerned. They hunted and fished and trapped whenever and wherever they pleased. Joe and I spent our time getting acquainted with the geography of the area, visiting the people. We visited every home in the--within the boundary. Getting acquainted with people learning what they--the people expected the park would be like and learning--loc--the locations of the lands that had already been purchased and the names of the people who resided on park land. All the information that we learned we--ah--gave to Mr. Holland in our daily reports. Joe and I usually worked at least six days a week, sometimes seven, long hours every day.

Strangely enough when the--ah--land had been bought and about--ah--half the of--the of--the acreage within the boundary had been purchased over the--the--last several years, a little at a time, as the funds were available. The owners were not required to vacate the land. In fact, ah--the land that--ah--had been purchased,--ah--mostly with the public--ah--subscriptions or by--ah--money appropriated by the state or by the profits made in the operation of Mammoth Cave,--ah--the--the lands were--aa--

a just bought and then forgotten about. That is--ah-- the people just remained on the land, and--ah-- they had reason to believe that they could just sell and and--ah-- continue to live on the land.

The two land buyers who had a--a--bought the land for the Kentucky National Park Commission over the several years were local citizens, one was named Almon DeMunbrun. He was a former state senator and--aaa--owned the telephone system which operated in Edmonson County. The other one was a man by the name of Gillis Vincent, who lived in Brownsville. He was the father of Beverly Vincent, a prominent lawyer, a former attorney general of Kentucky. And these two land buyers--either through a lack of knowledge of what a national park was all about or because they were directed to do so--had told many of these people that if they would sell, they could continue to live on the land as long as they wanted to. In fact Joe and I heard time and time again--ah--the use of the words "gentlemen's agreement"; --ah--these people believed that they had a verbal agreement which was not in writing. Nothing of this sort was in writing, but that they had been given a gentlemen's agreement that they could remain on the land for as long as they wanted to live there, if they'd just sell out. And this was to be a great obstacle, that we would have to overcome in getting the park vacated. Because the National Park Service certainly was not going to agree to assume jurisdiction there, for any purpose, until the land was vacated. As long as--ah--hundreds of people lived within the boundary, there was no possibility that the area could become a national park. And this was to be the great task that lay ahead of Mr. Holland and Joe and me.

At the end of June 1934, Joe and I completed our tour of duty with the Civilian Conservation Corps--and we were immediately employed by the Kentucky National Park Commission with the title of Park Ranger--and we moved to the Mammoth Cave Hotel. Our really big job commenced for us at this time. We were very fortunate to have Mr. Holland as park service representative there during this critical time.

Mr. Holland was a West Pointer, a typical West Pointer of that day. He was a pusher and the—the--type that was made famous by George Patton during the Second World War. He now had all his answers. He now had all the information he needed. He now knew what the problems were in the establishment of the park. The balance of the land had to be purchased. The park lands that were occupied had to be vacated. And there had to be some protection brought to the surface features of the park and the wildlife in the park.

We knew that the first task had to be to get the people off the land. And we began to think of ways that this could be done. We knew too that we would have no help whatsoever from the local authorities. They were in sympathy with the people within the park and--ah--for political reasons, if for no other reason, they would not want to intimidate that many people. But the local people at--ah--Brownsville, the local authorities had indicated in many ways during the previous year that they would not cooperate with us. I know on a occasion we would have vandalism which we would try to get prosecuted in the county court at Brownsville, but we were not successful. The county paper too, the *Edmonson County News*, opposed--ah--the park greatly and --ah--sided with the residents of the park. And they were to be--a--also a hindrance to us in what were--what we had to do.

Mr. Holland was a determined man and regardless of whether we had the support of the local authorities, he was going to get the job done--outside the law if necessary--and it seemed that it would be necessary.

We first got out the word....spread the word through the--ah--park area that the lands had to be vacated otherwise the--the national park would never come into being. But nobody moved. They waited for--err--for something else to happen. Then shortly after that, on one of my foot patrols at the mouth of Buffalo, I happened upon a man by the name of Richards taking property from a--an--an house that had been vacated at that point. I questioned him and he said he was a tenant on park land, lived in that Buffalo--ah--about the Buffalo area. He admitted that he had no right to take this

property, it didn't belong to him. And when I reported this incident to Mr. Holland, and he said he would--we would make an example of him. He would force him off the land --ah--if he didn't go voluntarily. So, Mr. Holland prepared a letter to this man, giving him twenty days to vacate the property--the park land. This Joe and I delivered to to this man Richards, and he told us bluntly that he didn't intend to move, that--ah--ah--he would not be forced off. At the end of twenty days he had not moved, so Mr. Holland strapped on his G1 45, and Joe and I loaded down with sledges and axes and crowbars, went to this home; and they had made no eff--no preparation to move. Mr. Holland gave them a few minutes to move their belongings out of the house, which they refused to do. So, Joe and Mr. Holland boosted me up on the roof of this--ah--house and--with a--I had instructions to tear the roof off, which I proceeded to do. It was mostly a wooden shingle--ah--roof with some--ah--pieces of--ah--galvanized metal, and while I was engaged in that, why Joe and Mr. Holland with sledge hammers tore down a boxed addition to the house, which would had been serving as a kitchen. In very short order, in about two hours, I had the roof just about off and they had this addition demolished. By this time, the people realized that--ah--the house--was not--would no longer be--ah--fit to occupy, and so they had moved their belongings out into the yard. This is the first time that we had to use--use this--use these tactics to move somebody off the park. It was a hard thing to do, but we were forced into it.

The news of this spread rapidly, and there were lots of threats against us. One man sent in word that he lived on park land, a tenant on park land, and if anybody climbed on his roof he'd shoot 'em off. But he was the next person to get the twenty day letter. When we arrived twenty days after--tha after--delivery of the letter, he was no longer there. He had moved before the expiration date. We breathed a lot easier when that happened. Some few people began to move. Mr. Holland then began to prepare these twenty-day letters selectively, a few at a time. First to the--ah--tenants, those who did not--ah--had not--owned land in the--in the--park, but who had--ah--occupied some of--of the houses on the lands and--ah--there began to be a gradual

movement of some of these people out of the park. After these twenty-day letters were delivered, Joe and I would visit these people--ah--every day, and it became apparent to them right away that we were.....that we intended to get--ah--the property vacated by force if necessary. So there began a movement out of the park.

In one other incident an old widower said--ah--he would not move and there would be a gunfight if we attempted to--ah--force him off the land. So, we found that he had a daughter in Horse Cave who had been trying to get him to move--ah--voluntarily and come live with her, but--ah-- this he steadfastly--re-- refused to do. But he did agree to go one day to visit with her--just the one day--and while he was gone, soon after he had departed, we--ah--we arrived with a crew of 3C boys and a bulldozer and we soon had the house demolished. And when he came back that evening, he found--aaa--just a pile of--a of--rubble on the ground where his house had been. Of course he was very irate about the whole thing, and had we been there, I [am] sure he would have tried to shoot us. But we, very wisely, stayed away until he had departed the--the--area.

Mr. Holland then turned his attention to a former owner--ah--the first one that we went after to--ah--force him off the land. So--ah--we picked a man who lived--who had owned--I and at--ah--on the south side of the river at Houchins Ferry, man by the name of Parsley. And this man we knew had moved his family into Brownsville--ah--but--ah--he intended to move, according to information we got, a tenant farmer into the farm home on this park land and to retain possession by means of the tenant farmer. Ugh-- we intended that this not happen, and--ah--we intended to tear down the--a--the buildings there before he had the opportunity to move the tenant farmer in there. So, --ah--we knew this man Parsley always went to the county court at--ah--Brownsville on court day, which was always the first Monday of the month. So we picked a Monday--ah--to get this job done. Mr. Holland sent Joe and me down there with about sixty 3C boys from Number 3 Camp at Joppa to--ah--tear the house down. A--ah--we very wisely--ah--asked for and got the help of a, one of the foreman, a man by the name of

Brax Combs who was a--pio--a mountaineer from Perry County, Kentucky, and he armed himself with a revolver which he kept at--ah--camp and away we went down there. And we found nobody about, so the boys immediately began work on this house, which was a two-story frame house upon top of a hill on the south side of the river at Houchins Ferry. And very short order, why they had these roof off and the second floor demolished and--ah--but somebody crossing the Houchins Ferry heard the noise upon the hill. And they took word into Parsley that something was going on at his old home place. Parsley boiled out of Brownsville, armed with a twelve gauge shotgun, and--ah--accompanied by a man... I believe he was the tenant farmer that he had--a had--intended to put into his--into that--farm home. And he arrived up on the hill where we were, out of breath, very mad. He jammed that shotgun into my chest and demanded that we stop work and get away from there. It looked pretty bad there for a few minutes. Parsley was--ah--very, very angry and--ah the ah--Brax Combs was standing behind him, with his hand on his revolver, and several of the 30 boys gathered around; and it--ah--looked rather ticklish there for a little bit. But I talked to Parsley and told him that we were there to take possession of this park property. That it was no longer his. We had a right to take possession of it. He had no right to retain possession, and we weren't going to leave until and unless he got some sort of an injunction or restraining order from the local authorities of Brownsville. And if he had it--he had such a restraining order--if he could get one delivered to us by--ah--ah-- the sheriff's department and if he did so, why we would honor it and leave. Well, Parsley by this time had cooled down some, so he hurriedly left and went back to Brownsville and--ah--while he was gone, we made very good use of the time to tear down the one barn on the place. So when Parsley got back with a deputy sheriff and a restraining order, we had accomplished what we had set out to do. The house was down, the barn was down, and it was impossible for anybody to--ah--live on the place.

So--ah--we got our the restraining order and we left. The—ah--this was the first time that we had used the—ah--to, we had--ah--gone after the—ah--original owner, and Parsley was a well-known prosperous farmer of Edmonson County--an extensive land owner--and we had certainly picked the right target from among the original owners. The effect of this incident was—ah--beyond our expectations. The—ah--as much consternation among the original owners that were within the park boundary; and Parsley went into court to get--aaa to try to get--a permanent injunction against us, but his effort did not stand. Many of the original owners, I am sure, began to consult their lawyers to see what their legal standing was. And there began to be a movement of the original owners out of the park.

About this time Joe Herrin, a former land owner at Sloan's Crossing, brought suit in the circuit court for that district, the state circuit court, in an attempt to retain possession of his place. And the case was heard some time later, several months later, by a circuit judge from Bowling Green. He was not from Brownsville, and Herrin lost his case. What we had done was to challenge these so called gentlemen's agreements, and they did not stand the court case. So,--ah--the exodus from the park began--and began--to accelerate. As fast as—ah--these buildings were vacated, crews of 3C boys would go in and—ah--raze the buildings. In many instances—ah--and wherever possible, the usable materials were given to former owners or to people who asked for them and had a need for them.

While all this was going on, some of the original owners who remained, decided that they would try to cultivate some of--the--the river bottoms. And when we found this happening, we would confiscate the plows and throw them in the river. Well, the Edmonson County paper, the Gimlet was editorializing and--ah--writing stories about some of our operations. They were usually inaccurate. And they did nothing to calm the situation, in fact their hostility expressed in their paper made a tense situation even worse. We continued to issue these eviction notices to both tenants and the formal owners, and that program was going along real well.

There were a number of families who resided around the Mammoth Cave hotel area. They were employees of the hotel, some of the guides lived there; so Mr. Holland decided that they must vacate also, and these notices went to them. And as fast as they moved out, the buildings were razed and the area cleared.

Because of the exodus from the park there was less traffic, so some of the ferries were closed. Ferries that have been operating at Dennison Ferry, The Turn Hole and Wet Buffalo were closed and only two ferries remained, Mammoth Cave and Houchins Ferry. Because of the increased traffic across these two ferries by the--ah--by the region of the camps, help was given by the enrollees to the ferry operators. And --ah--eventually of course, the park took over the operation entirely, and men were hired especially for that purpose as ferrymen.

By the spring of 1935, great work, much improvement had been done by these four 3C camps. And I would like to say, at this point, that the work of these enrollees in the four camps cannot receive sufficient praise. The Civilian Conservation Corps was one of the best things that came out of the thirties. Not only at Mammoth Cave, but throughout the country, much work was done by them--great valuable work of lasting importance.

At Mammoth Cave, by the spring of 1935, the major roads within the park had been ditched and graded and graveled. It was now possible to get over the main roads in automobiles and pickup trucks or any type of motor vehicle. And they had done a great deal of work in Mammoth Cave improving the trails. In fact it was on one of the work projects of 1935 within the cave, that the Indian mummy was found-- an incident that received so much publicity and press coverage at that time. These enrollees also did a great amount of work in stopping erosion - controlling erosion - and reforesting the area. They socialized with the local people, and some enrollees married into the families of the local people. Quite a number of the natives of the area got work in the four camps. Work of--oh--carpenters and--aa--blacksmiths and mechanics and other skilled type of work and that helped a great deal.

By this time also, the federal government had--ah--appropriated money to buy the balance of the land within the boundary. Two land buyers were on the scene and began to purchase the remaining land. Wherever possible they—ah—ah--bought the land--ah--peaceably and agreeably with the owners. But where that couldn't be done, well, they went to federal court in--ah--Bowling Green and brought condemnation suits against the owners and in such cases as that, the jury decided on the value of the land. But most of the remaining land was bought--ah--peaceably.

We began now to look forward to federal jurisdiction. The land, the balance of the land, was being purchased. The--ah—land--a that—ah--had been purchased was being vacated. The buildings, on the land being vacated, were razed and the area cleared. So we--ah--believed that--ah--the time for federal jurisdiction was at hand. The requirements for--ah--establishment of the park were rapidly being met. But federal jurisdiction was not to take place for another year. As I have stated previously, bootlegging of moonshine whiskey was going on at some homes in the park, a problem that effected the four 3C camps, and was a great—ano--annoyance to the--ah—company--aaa-- personnel. So, we went to the--ah--alcohol tax unit of the Treasury Department for help, and we got the help of two investigators who were stationed at Bowling Green. And--ah--we got search warrants, swore out search warrants for the homes of several of these known bootleggers. And we assisted these investigators in--ah--making the searches, and the subsequent cases were heard in the federal district court in--ah--Bowling Green. A little later we assisted in the raiding of a--of a--moonshine still.

Our efforts to reduce the amount of hunting on park lands was--ah--confined mostly to issuing warnings and asking people to not hunt on park lands. And to tell 'em that they were trespassing and that hunting was prohibited on park land. Because—ah-- since we had no support from the local courts it would have been useless to take any cases into--ah--county court at Brownsville. So this is about the only thing that we could do under the circumstances. Then to, with the exodus of the people from the

park, there were fewer people left to violate the hunting regulation. When we found a trap line, why we would destroy it, confiscate the traps. And--ah--, so that was about all we could do at this time to enforce the game laws.

Our successes were not to be without costs. During the next year and a half or two years--ah--we were to undergo a baptism of fire, literally. Obviously, the direct actions that we had taken to get the people to move had created a great amount of hostility. They--ah--, the people, who--ah--had sold land really believed that those so called gentlemen's agreements were valid, and they did not blame the land buyers for the fact that they had to move. The land buyers were local citizens. But they blamed us, because we were outsiders and we were interlopers, so we were the ones who were blamed for their having to move. Of course, they were giving up their churches, their communities, their neighbors and--ah--so a great deal of hostility developed.

It was--ah--of course, Mr. Holland knew that to vacate the land by taking court action, by eviction through court action would have taken probably years. But he was not about to let this thing drag on for years. He was there to bring about the establishment of the national park as quickly as possible. And that would not have been possible at all, had we had to go through the regular legal channels to get it done. But we were to pay a penalty for all that we had accomplished thus far. And it all stemmed from the fact that the land buyers had misled the people into believing that--ah--that they could remain there after they had sold the land.

We began to have a few incendiary fires and this led to the creation of a first class fire protection system. Under the direction and supervision of the park forester, Ivan Elsworth, a very able man, primary towers were built at--ah--Hickory Cabin, Books Know and at--ah--Number 1 Camp. Secondary towers were built White Oak, Ollie, and at Sloan's Crossing. A dispatcher's office was set up at--ah--park headquarters. Fires were quickly detected from the towers, reported to the dispatcher who had--ah--crews dispatched from the--ah--nearest 3C camp and the fires suppressed. These fires increased in number until we literally had hundreds of them.

They were most always set in--ah--broom sedge[?] fields where they ignited quickly. And they did very little damage, if any, to the timber, but they--er--were certainly a great annoyance to all of us, especially to the 3C camps. And that was especially true in the North District, where there was more hostility than in the South District. They--uh--there was very little we could do really to control the situation. On one occasion, we--a--caught two boys in the very act of setting a fire in the--ah--park, but we could get no prosecution started in Brownsville. So, as we were sort of helpless at this time and nothing much could be done until federal jurisdiction took place. When we--a--then could get the court the cases into federal court. But these fires were a tremendous annoyance and a lot--a--the CCC boys were fighting fires when they should of could be doing more worth-while work.

Joe and I, being in uniform, were the most visible symbols of the park, and--ah--we became--ah--targets of--ah--hostility. Up to this point, Joe and I had not been allowed to carry firearms. Mr. Holland was usually armed when he was with us, but he was not always along because he had much office work to do. So Joe and I were many times in grave danger. The reason that we weren't allowed to carry firearms was the fact that--ah--there was no real, that as we could not get any cases heard in the local courts, so it was useless to take anything there. So, Mr. Holland felt we be in--aa--safer if we weren't armed than if we were. He couldn't conceive of anybody shooting a unarmed man. But that was to be a grave mistake which almost cost me my life. I know one time Joe was shot at as he went down the river in--a--in--a--boat near the turn hole. I was shot at in the woods in the North District. We had--ah--a car--ah--riddled with bullets that--aa--was parked on a side road up near Hickory Cabin. We all, we--we --thought that these were incidents--a--to try to intimidate us rather than to really hurt us. So that gave us a false sense of security. But on October 28, 1935, an incident occurred that--ah--just about cost me my life.

Ah--we--a had gotten an anonymous tip that some hunting was going on just north of the turn hole on park land, and we were sent over there--Joe and I-- to a check

it out. And--a--if we found any hunting to ahh warn the people off and tell 'em they were trespassing. But we didn't know, and we didn't know till later, that this anonymous tip was all part of a conspiracy that had been--ah--that'd taken place among some of the local people, a conspiracy to shoot one of the rangers. Not being willing to do the dirty work themselves, these conspirators had found a notorious character by the name of Parker to do the job for 'em. Parker, we--ah--didn't know him and he--aa--didn't know us. Of course we were in uniform and so he could easily distinguish us, but we had never seen him before and we didn't know his reputation. But he was out on parole having served just a part of his sentence for murder. And--ah--he was a very--aa--dangerous character we were to learn later, a treacherous person, a bushwhacking type. And--ah--when we arrived in this area which was about two miles north of the turn hole, why Parker was waiting and ready. We had heard some shooting before we got into the area where these hunters were and Joe--would aha--and I had separated, he going around to the right and turning to--ah--to come in toward the hunters from a different direction. But I went directly toward 'em and I arrived there first. When I was within about a hundred feet or so of these hunters, there was three of them, I got that close before they saw me; Parker leveled a shotgun at me and ordered me to stop. The other two hunters, there names were Davis--they lived at the mouth of Buffalo--they immediately ran off, and they were not present when the shooting took place.

I told Parker that--that--he was hunting on park land which was prohibited, that he was trespassing, and that he was to leave. I started forward again and--as I did so--I stepped over a small log, which was on the ground, and--ah--that must have thrown my body out of line some, because as he pulled the trigger I got a part of the charge in my left arm and shoulder instead of--of directly in my chest. Well, of course, I was very stunned an--ah--in shock from this blow from the shotgun. Parker pulled a revolver out of his pocket and--ah--leveled it at me, and I was sure that he was going to finish the job. But he must have thought that I was pretty far gone or for some reason, I never

knew why, he changed his mind, put his revolver back in his pocket, and he ran off and left me there. Joe heard this shot fired and he came that direction and found me and helped me back to the river, which was about two mile distant. And--ah--we had been sent over on the north side of the river by a man named Rich who lived some 200 to 300 yards from the river. And he was to pick us up about three o'clock in the afternoon, but this occurred about noon, and it had begun to rain rather heavily by this time. And Rich could not hear us by calling, so we--ah--, Joe stripped off and dived into the river. It was pretty chilly, it was the 28th day of October, he swam across the river, got the skiff and came back and got me and took me to--ah--got me to Number 3 Camp at Joppa.

The doctor who--a a--provided medical care for the enrollees happened to be at Number 3 Camp at the time, and he gave me first aid. Mr. Holland was notified and he was down there very quickly and took me on to the--a--hospital at Glasgow. I recovered rather quickly from this wound which was--aaa--painful but not that serious. *The Edmondson County News* briefly reported this incident, inaccurate as usual. But really this incident reacted in our favor. The better class of people--ah--were revolted by this attempt to take my life. It was a well-known fact among the population that Joe and I did not go armed. So this--ah--a-shooting of me, without provocation, did not go over very good with the better class of people in the area. Parker too was a very unsavory character, well-known throughout that--ah--area as a very dangerous man. And--ah--certainly, they didn't want to take his side at all, not in a--a situation such as this.

We were--ah--immediately armed by Mr. Holland. He--he--a--aa--got firearms for us from the army--ug--ah--the GI 45 revolvers and a great supply of ammunition. And he was an expert special--sh--shot, so it was [not] long until my many, many hours of practice, that Joe I became pretty proficient with handguns. Now that we were able shoot back, why we--we were given a little more respect than we had been in the past.

We teamed up with a deputy sheriff who was assigned there to Mammoth Cave, and we went on a hunt for Parker. But he was related to quite a number of people around and they protected him pretty well, so we were never able to catch him. Some time later, he surrendered to the local authorities of Brownsville and received some small fine. He was not sent back to prison to serve out the balance of term for murder. But he was fined and released. Course, this is--a--again shows how little regard we held in by the authorities of Brownsville. I never saw Parker again after that incident, although I stayed there for another six years or so; and I never saw him again. And it is probably a good thing that I didn't because--ah--for a while after that incident I was determined never to give Parker a second chance. And had we ever met it is probable that one of us might have lost his life. But I am glad that I never encountered him anymore. He--ah--avoided me apparently because I never saw him anymore after that --ah--after that incident.

But this was the last really serious confrontation that Joe and I had. Now that we were armed, and able to defend ourselves, why no one confronted us anymore and --- ---aaa---things got better for us. Also, we--ah--began to make some cases in federal court. The lands that had been bought with federal money were, of course,--ah--any violations on them could be taken to federal court. And we swore out arrest warrants for people that we found,--ah viol--violators that we found. And we assisted the Deputy U.S. Marshall in serving these arrest warrants, and the cases were heard at--ah-- Bowling Green; and we had quite a bit of success at that sort of thing.

On September 1, 1936, the federal jurisdiction took place. The National Park Service took over a jurisdiction for protection purposes only. Joe and I were--ah-- given temporary--park a-- park ranger assignments, and Mr. Holland became acting superintendent. From then on why, whatever cases we had went into federal court, and the lawlessness began to subside substantially. Enough of these fires continued for some time after that, but not as many as heretofore. And so gradually things began to calm down at Mammoth Cave.

But--ah--the three of us did not remain at Mammoth Cave. Mr. Holland--ah--stayed on there as acting superintendent until the spring of 1938, when he was transferred to Zion National Park as assistant superintendent. But Mr. Holland didn't remain--in--in the park service. Early on before the Second World War commenced, he was recalled to active duty and--a--after the war he did not rejoin the park service. Mr. Holland served in the Pacific Theater during the war and remained in the military for some time after the war ended. His drive and leadership, and his willingness to take risks, advanced the establishment of the park by a great deal. He was--ah--the right man for the job. The Park Service had picked well in sending him down there as the--their--a representative.

Lt. Col. Robert Perkins Holland, U. S. Army, the first superintendent at Mammoth Cave, died on the 4th day of May, 1986, in Hanover, New Hampshire. Joe Ridge stayed on at Mammoth Cave until the end of 1937. And he returned to Louisville, and he went into banking and real estate. He was quite successful and is now retired and lives in Florida. He and I are close friends. We have--ah--remained good friends all through these years. The experiences we shared together created a bond between us that lasted--has lasted--our lifetimes. Joe enlisted in the Navy and served throughout the war. He was in the reserves and was also called to duty during the Korean War. I remained at Mammoth Cave until February of 1942, working mostly in the fire protection program and general patrol duties. But it was never the same for me after Joe and Mr. Holland had left there. It was very quite and all seemed rather anti-climatic. In February of 1942, I was offered and accepted the position of inspector with the Alcohol Tax Unit of the Treasury Department. The agency is now known as the Bureau of Alcohol, Tobacco and Firearms. I continued on with that agency until I retired at the end of 1974. Strangely, just a few days after I had entered on duty with the Alcohol Tax Unit I received an offer of a ranger's position in--the--in Yellowstone, but I declined the offer. I served in the Army during the war in the Military Police Forces. I suppose it was just as well that the three of us didn't remain at Mammoth

Cave, because it was time for the healing process to commence. And the three of us were identified with those violent times, the formative times and--it ah--a new team could do a better job of--of--continuing on the work down there. On my infrequent visits to Mammoth Cave National Park I can't see things as they are today, rather I see them as they were back in the thirties. But that was long ago and of all the people that lived in the park at that time, only the dead remain. (count 576)