

7-29-2007

Interview with Clint Thompson Regarding CCC (FA 81)

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TRANSCRIPT

RECORDING NO.: Tape 8

INTERVIEWER: Kelly Lally

INTERVIEWEE: Clint Thompson

DATE OF INTERVIEW: 7/29/1987

PLACE OF INTERVIEW: Cub Run, KY

OTHER PEOPLE PRESENT:

EQUIPMENT USED:

AMOUNT OF RECORDING (TAPE/MINIDISK) USED: 22:29

DESCRIPTION OF CONTENTS:

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

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

KEY: K=Kelly Lally
C=Clint Thompson

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 to talk with Mr. Clint Thompson. Today is July the 29th, 1987. Where were you born?

C: Where?

K: When and where?

C: I was born the third day of December, 1921.

K: And where?

C: Here in Cub Run, I guess. Down the hill here, about a couple mile.

K: Have you lived in this area basically all of your life?

C: Yes ma'am.

K: How many people were in your family?

C: There was seven of us kids, five boys, two girls.

K: And where did you fall in that number?

C: Ma'am?

K: Where did you fall in that number? Which number were you? Were you the oldest?

C: I was fourth.

1:09 K: What were times like for your family during the Depression?

C: Rough. Rough.

K: Did your family farm for a living?

C: Yes ma'am.

K: How did you hear about the CCC?

C: Well, it was something that President Roosevelt got up. So, started from there, I guess.

K: Were there a lot of young men in this area //

C: Several.

K: Was there any particular way that you were selected to be in the CCC around here?

C: I think they selected those from Munfordsville or somewhere that had a—I don't know whether they had a committee, or what they had. Picking out boys to go, see.

K: Did you know of anybody who wasn't accepted for the CCC for some reason?

C: No.

K: So when did you enter the CCC?

C: March the fifteenth, 1939.

K: And how old were you then?

C: Seventeen.

K: You were real young. How long were you in the CCC?

C: Seventeen days 'til three years. See two years was the limit. Then I be the "A.P" they call them. They kept me—Must've been a pretty good hand or something. Kept me as a "A.P". So I stayed seventeen days before the CC camp broke up.

K: And which camp were you in?

C: Number four.

2:55 K: Do you remember how you felt when you left home for the CCC?

C: Well I felt like I was leaving forever, I guess. [chuckles] Never been away from home much. About as far as I ever was away from home, I guess, down there, when I first started, you know, in '39. I stayed home and helped my mother. My dad got killed when I was twelve. So, it come in awful handy. I helped my mother, what money we got. So that's good money back then. Forty-five dollars a month, your board and clothes.

K: Did you get homesick at all?

C: Yes ma'am, I did. Near seventeen miles from home.

K: Did you get to come and visit at all? Did you come visit?

C: Did I do what?

K: Did you come back home to visit sometimes?

C: Oh yeah, every weekend. About every weekend when you didn't have, wasn't on K.P. That's maybe once a month. Walked seventeen miles.

K: You walked the whole way?

C: Walked home. Walked back. So, finally there's a couple turley fellows down there would bring us home for—come and get us for fifty cents. Twenty-five cents each way.

K: Did you have any special training before you went into the CCC? Did they send you to Fort Knox or anything?

C: Oh no, no ma'am. Just called me up and I went, just like calling you for the Army, I reckon. Passed examination.

4:37 K: Do you remember your very first day in camp?

C: Yes, we had to listen to speeches most of the time, most of the day.

K: What kind of speeches?

C: Oh, they'd tell us about the work, and stuff like that, see. 'Course they had good recreation. We had ball teams, five barracks. There was five barracks, and I believe it was two hundred people to each barrack. If I hadn't forgotten. It's been a long time ago.

K: Sounds about right. Um, so first you were paid thirty dollars a month, and then pretty soon you made forty-five.

C: Forty-five. As a leader. As a barracks leader and a field leader.

K: You were pretty young to be a leader. You think?

C: Well I was a good worker, I guess. It was hard work on the farms then, I worked hard on the farm. All of them took a liking to me, the sergeant, the superintendent, and the lieutenant. I got in with them all, see.

K: Well, I know you sent some of your money home. How did you spend your personal money?

C: See, we got paid with cash. So, I don't know how I spent it. I guess, no more than that, it wasn't very hard to get rid of. 'Course back then, that's pretty good money, '39, '40.

K: Did you go into any of the towns very often? Cave City, or—

C: No, I didn't. Most of the boys did.

K: You came home most of the time on the weekend.

C: Right. Yah, we'd come home, my mother and four other kids at home, see. I like to hunt and fish, so I come home, fish and hunt.

6:30 K: Well aside from becoming a camp—or, yeah, a camp leader or whatever, barracks leader //

C: Well actually, and a field leader.

K: Field leader. What role did you have in the camp? What job did you do?

C: See, I'd have to see that the barracks was kept clean and the beds was made up good in each barracks. I mean, in my barracks, see. If I was over—Well I started and then they find—They wanted, they kept moving me. I reckon I kept it in pretty good shape. The boys, you weren't supposed to leave no wrinkles in your bed. 'Course, when you double your sheet back, your blanket, it's supposed to have been real straight and neat. So if it wasn't just right, we just ripped the sheet back to the blanket, and make them make it over. If the lieutenant caught him, he give him—how many?—five or ten days extra duty on K.P., see, in the kitchen. Wash the dishes, peeling potatoes.

7:35 K: What projects did you work on?

C: I worked on the telephone line, mostly. Climbing telephone poles for eighteen months. Then I had worked in Mammoth Cave on bad days, picking up cigarette butts, carrying sand. That's the hardest place I ever worked a bunch of men, is in the cave. You worked forty-five men, would carry two shovels full of sand for two miles in a grass hat, put over your shoulder. 'Course I didn't have to carry—all I'd have to carry was a lantern. See if they got there. 'Course some of them would hide, and pour their sand out, and catch us on our way back, you know. It's hard to keep up with forty-five men with a carbide lantern.

K: Well when you were putting up the telephone lines, what exactly did you have to do? I mean, did you have to put up the poles?

C: Right, put up the poles, carry them across the hollers. Then stretch the wire, then climb the poles and put them up. Cleaned the right of way, see, cleared the right of way for it. Had an awful good boss, his name was Fisher. We called him “Pap.” Mighty good fella. He was foreman, see.

K: How many people worked putting up the telephone lines?

C: Well, we usually about twenty-five of us, I guess, in a crew. They put them out in crews, see, they called them “crews.” Some worked in the quarry, some on the road, some on the telephone lines, see. Some worked in the cave, picking up cigarette butts. Pretty good job back then.

9:30 K: Were you putting up lines for just camp number four? Or were you doing it for //

C: Oh no, the national park.

K: The whole national park.

C: Whole national park.

K: Did any other camps have a crew that put up lines?

C: No ma’am. No, it’s number four had that. Had the crew of putting up the telephone lines. I did lay some rock while I was in there. Helped build rock walls around Mammoth Cave. Supposed to build head walls out of the rock, chisel them out, lay them, just like laying concrete block. But they’d be square. I guess you’ve seen those houses in Mammoth Cave? Them rock houses? Our CC’s put them up.

K: They’re wonderful.

C: Yep.

10:27 K: Can you describe a typical day for you in the CCC? Like when you got up, what you did for the job, work?

C: Well not particular, I don’t guess, ‘cause it’s—After I got used to it, I liked it awful well. It’s, got in with everybody, sergeant. Me and sergeant got along fine.

K: Did you make a lot of good friends?

C: Oh yeah. Made a lot of good friends.

K: How much free time did you have?

C: I believe we got a sick day a month, believe it was. Maybe a vacation day. I’m not for sure.

K: And then your weekends?

C: Right. On Saturday at noon, see you get off Saturday at noon.

K: And you would come home and then go back on Sunday?

C: Back on Sunday.

K: That's a lot of traveling for two days!

C: Yeah. But we didn't mind it back then. Why, we run the most of the way back. Didn't have no cars or nothing.

11:37 K: Did you ever participate in any of the recreation or education programs?

C: I was a softball pitcher. 'Course, every barrack had a team, see. So we'd play softball every night. One barracks would play the other, see. I never was a hand to fuss in the ball game, and that's why I got in with all the big shots, I reckon. They took a liking to me. I didn't fuss any. Didn't want to fight any. I wanted to play ball. I didn't want to fight. I didn't go out there to fight, I went to play ball.

K: Did you ever participate in the education programs that they had?

C: I went to school some in there, night school.

K: What did you study? Do you remember?

C: Well, first aid, and just different stuff. I used to have a first aid card. Don't know what I ever done with it. It is, of course, that's been a long time ago.

K: And you got it when you were there?

C: Right, pass the test and everything. Pulse beat and everything, you know. I wouldn't know one from another now. Find one on my arm once in a while.

12:54 K: Did the CCC boys play pranks on each other?

C: Oh my gosh, yes. Hot-foot 'em.

K: How did they do that?

C: They would take cigarette papers and put shoe polish on it, catch you asleep, lay it on your foot, and set fire with a match. You can get that shoe off pretty quick!

K: Do you remember any other ones?

C: Well, there's all kind of pranks pulled. There's lots of times, some of them would cause fights. 'Course, most of them, most of the people likes to prank. And I always, I was always a pranker.

K: What did you used to do?

C: I'd rather pull a prank on a feller just to eat. [laughs] I run a grocery store out here for eight years. I threw eggs at people and everything else.

K: [laughs]

C: Bought a lot of eggs back then, in cases, you know. People come along in their road wagon, bring their eggs and chickens off.

K: When you get that many young men together too, I'm sure.

C: Right.

K: A lot going on.

14:16 K: Where was camp number four situated?

C: It's about seventeen mile on this side of green river is all I could tell you, on down this road here. Houchins, well Mammoth Cave—it was always called Mammoth Cave for a [unintelligible]. Have his address.

K: Was there much interaction among the different CCC camps? Like number one and two, or two and four?

C: Well it's all about the same, they all did about the same thing.

K: Did they have much to do with each other?

C: Yes, we played ball against each other and things like that, see.

K: What about socializing at all?

C: Not too much. Not they made it in town, or something, some of the boys got together, talk about the others. I have to say, I didn't go to town much. I always come home. Thought I was needed at home, mostly, back then.

15:25 K: How did the white people feel about the presence of blacks in the nearby camp? Do you think it made any kind of difference? Was there any tension?

C: Not that much, I don't think. 'Course we weren't around the blacks much. Had a different—I believe their company was number one. Ours, four, and had number two. Had number three, and tore it out before I went, about '37 they tore it out.

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

C: They didn't think too much about it. 'Course, all the camps is in the national park, so there wasn't many houses around.

K: Earlier on I had heard that there was some tension, maybe not with the CCC, but with the park service, 'cause a lot of people lost their homes and their farms.

C: Mm-hmm. That's when it's first, when they first put them in, I guess. I don't know when they first put them CC camps in. I guess in the—

K: '33.

C: Do you know when?

K: I think '33.

C: Was it? I think it's about '28. I didn't know.

K: Yeah, I think it was '33, right after Roosevelt got elected. Um, so—

C: That's right, Roosevelt was the one that put them in. It was '33.

16:48 K: So most of the people liked the guys being in the area? Was there positive feelings?

C: No, they didn't, they didn't seem to care. 'Course I guess they got used to it, like we got this lake in down here, see, and they all feel kinda bad about the government taking their land for the lake, see, but they got over it now. And they're all fishing well, I reckon.

K: Did many of the CCC boys interact with the townspeople, go into any of the towns, or spend time with the local residents in any way?

C: Not as I know. Like I said, I never did go out with them, see. 'Course they sent a truck out about every Saturday night to the shows, Cave City. In the three years I was in there, I never did go with them.

K: Did many of the guys date local girls?

C: Probably, yeah, probably did.

17:55 K: How successful do you feel like the CCC was in relieving the effects of the Depression?

C: It really helped me, and my mother. We didn't have much growing up. Raised on cornbread and sorghum 'lasses. [chuckles] 'Course, I tried to help what I could with the forty-five dollars, see. Wouldn't go very far. Helped her pay her place off. I bought seventy-five acres, I believe, for three hundred dollars. Paid twenty-five dollars a month out of that forty-five. So helped some. She sold some of it off and then kept most of it, see, to get out of debt. My dad was in debt when he died. So it really helped us, I think.

K: Do you think it helped the residents around the Mammoth Cave area?

C: Did what?

K: Do you think it helped the residents around the Mammoth Cave area with their economy?

C: I would think so. I think that's one of the best things that ever happened to them. People grew up pretty poor back then. There wasn't no jobs or nothing. What jobs they had didn't pay nothing. So it really helped, I think. Like an inch from myself, it helped us. Me and my mother and the four kids that was home.

19:22 K: What do you consider to be the greatest contribution of the CCC, to I guess, in general? Maybe not just in this area, but in our nation, even? Do you think it was just getting everybody back to work?

C: I would think so. It helped people back to work.

K: Do you think it made a difference in the military? For World War II?

C: I would think so. We had to do some drilling in there and everything, we's boys were ready when they did go. Know more about the military, see. 'Course every evening we'd have drills, see. Hike, run, take exercise every morning, get us out before breakfast. [unintelligible] It's pretty good, I thought.

K: Were there any problems with the CCC at all? Were there—in administration or in between, like some of the guys—that you could see from your //

C: No, no, I couldn't see any.

K: What did you //

C: Wonderful //

K: // Go ahead.

C: Wonderful thing, I thought.

K: What did you do after you got out?

C: I went to Louisville and got a job. Then I stayed up there three or four years, then I moved back down and went in the grocery business. Then I went to work for the highway department, worked twenty-four and a half years as maintenance before I retired three years ago. I retired when I was sixty-two. I'm sixty-five now. December third. So—

K: Well, is there anything else you'd like to tell me about your experience with the CCC?

C: That's about all I know, I guess. 'Course you forget a whole lot. Forty-some years. I guess it's been forty-eight years. Forty-eight or –nine years. Forget a whole lot in that length of time.

K: Well, um, I don't have any more questions, so, I'll go ahead and stop the tape.

C: That's about all I know to tell you I guess.

K: I really appreciate it, thank you.

[CONCLUSION OF INTERVIEW]