

CCC 12
Sam Thompson
June 19, 2000
38 pages – Open

Mr. Thompson begins the interview by describing his early education, life during the Depression, and the public perception of President Franklin Roosevelt (page 1-2). He then discusses farming in south Florida and the plight of sharecroppers (page 3). Mr. Thompson and Mr. O'Neal recall how they heard about the Civilian Conservation Corps (CCC) and compare their experience to army recruitment (page 4-5). Mr. Thompson talks about the time limits of the program; he personally enrolled three times because there was no other employment available (page 6-7). They both explain the different positions within the CCC and their corresponding pay levels (page 8). Mr. O'Neal analyzes racial segregation in the camp (page 9-10).

They review the different projects undertaken: road building, putting up fences, and reforestation (page 11, 14). Mr. Thompson explains the relationship with white administrators (page 12). They talk about law enforcement in the camp, physical requirements, and the issue of choice of camps (page 13). Then, community relations are discussed, and they point out the effect of different camps' reputations (page 15). Mr. Thompson talks about joining the CCC with friends and the hazing of rookies (page 16). They both relate the racial hierarchy of labor in the camps as identical to society in general (page 17). They mention the role of seniority in the organization and the added responsibilities it carries (page 18-19).

They again mention the various types of labor, the intensity of the work, and describe a typical day in the field (page 19-20). They talk about the skills acquired during the experience, for example, being an understudy to a secretary (page 21). They discuss the conditions of the camp: the toilets, sprinklers, and barracks (page 22). Discipline and punishment are mentioned, and they then turn to a discussion of moonshine, its legality, and its appeal to the workers (page 23-24). They recall the recreational events of camp life: ball games, card games, dances, movies, shopping, etc. (page 25). Education and literacy classes were also available at the camp (page 26).

They discuss desertion (page 27) as well as the medical facilities and doctors that were available to them (page 28). They talk about homesickness and the leave policy (page 28-29). They treat racial tensions as a problem among individuals rather than a camp issue (page 30). The CCC was not seen as controversial, as fascist or socialist, but rather as a good program that accepted anyone who wanted work (page 31). They feel that the CCC was deserving of its reputation as one of the New Deal's best programs, but do not believe it would be successful today (page 32). Mr. Thompson discusses how the program helped prepare him for military service (page 33). He talks about the CCC as a godsend for the south during a time of famine and as a significant program for African-Americans (page 34). They both feel a sense of pride when seeing physical evidence of old CCC projects in the present day (page 35). Finally, they talk about life after leaving the CCC and the fate of some of their fellow workers (page 36-37).

CCC 12

Interviewee: Sam Thompson, Willie O'Neal

Interviewer: Ben Houston

Date: June 19, 2000

H: It is June 19, 2000, and I am in the home of Mr. Sam Thompson. Mr. Thompson, thank you for agreeing to meet with me on this. Where and when were you born, sir?

T: July, 1917, Miami, Florida.

H: Did you grow up in Miami?

T: Yes.

H: Do you have siblings that you grew up with?

T: I had two brothers and one sister, yes.

H: Did they follow you into the CCC?

T: No. One brother followed me in.

H: What did your folks do for a living, sir?

T: Common laborer.

H: Where did you go to school down in Miami?

T: Liberty City Academy, I think they called it then, and a short time at Booker T. Washington High School.

H: That is in Overtown [section of Miami], right?

T: That is in Overtown.

H: How far did you get in school?

T: Eleventh grade.

H: Did you like it?

T: Schooling? Yes, I guess I did. I had to have an education, and my parents would not let me sit around the house, so I had to like it. Did I like school? That is a good question. I think I did. The company of the children, you know, the

classmates and things like that, it was all right.

H: Did you work as you were in school, before you went into the CCC?

T: Yes, at little odd jobs. Raking leaves and things like that, running errands.

H: I would be interested in hearing some of your memories of the Depression, either good or bad. Did the Depression hit your family especially hard?

T: Really, I do not remember too much about the Depression, except talk. I heard an awful lot of talk from the old folks, who were saying, well, we do not have this. Then the newspaper and the radio was telling about people committing suicide, especially the rich people and all that sort of thing. In the black community, there was no such thing as suicide. I mean, they just did not believe in killing themselves over a little piece of money or the stock market going broke. As far as the food on the table, my dad always took care of that. Our clothing and school supplies and things like that, we always had that. I guess, maybe like everybody else, we felt the Depression in a way, but it was not shown to us like we were starving, or something of that nature.

H: Did you feel that the Depression helped or hurt race relations when you were growing up?

T: It might have aggravated an awful lot of people to the point where the few jobs that were there, they were giving [them] to the whites. That made an awful lot of people angry, because of the fact that people would be working for a company a pretty good while and then, here is the Depression and they laid you off, [because] there is a white person who just come on the job and he is there. I think maybe there was a little friction there. I do not know this, but common sense is telling me things like that might have happened.

H: How did your family feel about Franklin Roosevelt and the New Deal?

T: Godsend. He was the man that had the plan, so to speak. Actually, Roosevelt had something, well, he had a winning voice, one thing. I remember a lot of his speeches, especially the one declaring war, and those fireside chats he used to have, they were really good. There was no question about it. He was a person who did not have anything to hide from the American people. He told them exactly what he was trying to do, the progress he has made along these lines, and the plans that he had for the people.

H: We do not have many politicians like him anymore, do we?

T: Oh Lord, no.

H: Do you remember how your fellow campers at the CCC felt about Roosevelt?

T: They all felt the same way, I do believe, because whenever he would have a speech, we would all gather around the radio to listen. It is a funny thing that you ask that because I do not know, I think we were too young to really realize the full extent of what was going on at that particular time, the Depression, the build-up of war in Europe and all that sort of stuff.

O: **[Willie O'Neal:]** Let me just say this, concerning that Depression. See, as far as we were concerned, we could not vote for a county commissioner or governor of Florida. We could vote for the president, but it was a U.S. deal. That filled a little more **bottom-entries** for us at our **ways** at that time in the 1930s. Because all we knew was the president. Our governor, we just knew that he is elected, and they mostly got elected to what they could do to us more so than what they could help us with, at that time. See? That is what I wanted to say. That was part of the facts of life at that time.

H: How did you feel that the Depression affected you on a long-term basis?

T: Long term? Well, if it was not for the Depression, in all probabilities, I would not have come in contact with the knowledge of the CCC. Like I told you, odd jobs did not do that much, so when the CCC came along, naturally everybody—not everybody, but a lot of people—said, well, this is it.

O: To go with that, there were so many other things. The CCCs were [for people the age of] eighteen to twenty-four, but [there was] the WPA [Works Progress Administration; New Deal Program] and other things that went for the older people. But that is the way it was. Now, we got different backgrounds. [Mr. Thompson] was born and raised in a big city, but I was born in Marion County on the farm. The farm was different from the city, see. Everybody there did not have hogs and cows, but the ones who did, the others could get it, so nobody had to go hungry too much, really. Still, it was no different, just less money. You know, everybody was not poor and broke, but most were. And the ones who had it did not know how to keep it, see? That is the way it was.

H: Did your folks grow crops as well? I mean, you were in Miami, but did you have a garden plot?

T: We had a little garden, yes. Everybody had a little garden at that time, a ten- to fifteen-foot box, and that was about it. Land was too expensive to grow crops on in my section. Now, further south, they had farms down there around _____ and south Miami. They had a lot of crops growing down there. I think they called it truck-farming. The land was so rich, you could grow two or three crops a year. Most of your vegetables and a little fruit and whatnot came from that area at that

particular time. They have gotten to the point now where they got fertilizer and everything else that they could grow, probably, something here in this room.

O: Well, they still grew farming on this way, but with south Florida, like you said, you could grow two or three crops. You could not, up here. You could grow one crop. That is mostly what they did down there. That was the place. A lot of people went from down here to down there [south Florida], you know, to work on those farms. That was the lowly country, south Florida, see. But anybody, just like today, somebody is going to get **left [behind, economically]**. Some had harder times than others, some at their own will and some just hard luck. It is the same today. Not the same today, because there are a lot of things people have a chance at now. We did not have a chance at it. We happened to be on the farm, but we were not sharecropping. We had our own little farm. People sharecropping, the man they were sharecropping from, he was the one who had the say-so over what they made, and [the sharecroppers] always wound up in debt. Still, if you had your own [farm], you had to get the fertilizer through them. You had to deal with them, and this was **different**, some of them just good as gold, really. That is the way it was, just how lucky you were, who you were dealing with. They were the ones running the hardware store, the seed store, the banks and all that.

T: That was one of the reasons why you had such a big migration from the South to the North during that time, sharecroppers just leaving those farms because they were not doing anything there. They were just working themselves to death and had nothing to show.

O: And Florida, really, it was most like Georgia, Alabama, and Mississippi. It was just about like going north, coming into Florida. **[South Florida] was segregated, but it was not as bad. See, that was where the difference was. Yeah, [North Florida] was just as bad.**

T: Yes, and that was because of the northern influx into Florida.

O: Yes, because tourists come down to Florida.

H: How did you come to hear about the CCC? Do you remember?

T: It was advertised.

O: And Roosevelt, after he got elected, see, at that time, you know, the president did not take office until the 4th of March. He got elected in November. They [are] is still called the president-elect, they go into office on the 20th of January. Still the thing, but it is just in March. But, Roosevelt, I think they changed it after his first term, but anyway, that is the way it was. But in term when he got elected, he

had all these things. The first camp was built in the CCC in April in 1933, so these things were right in plan.

H: Yes, it was a priority of his.

O: So, that was one of the things, and the other: WPA and the NRA, you know, National Recovery Act. That was for farmers until you **get paid**. But the war is what really changed things. The Depression had changed a lot, but I am just saying, the war is what made things really change.

H: Do you remember going to the recruiter to sign up? What was the procedure for that?

T: It was more or less like an army recruiting [center]. I mean, there was an office sitting up in a certain place, and you go in there and you sign up. Then, they tell you what time to come back with what they need to carry. You did not carry too much with you, shaving equipment or something of that nature. Even then, they issued you those supplies and things after you got into the boot camp. But they would tell you when to come back and when you were leaving, and they explained to you what the pay was and, you know, the general overall of the program. They explained all that to you before you leave.

H: Did they tell you where you were going?

T: They tell you which camp you were going to, for, what do you call it, break-in?

O: And you took that examination so you get _____ to go. I went to _____. Everybody but Putnam County, all of the counties met in Gainesville. That is where they examined you. Then that was when you know what camp. Actually, everyone, black, white and all. Not the same time, but that same place. Same exam for both kinds. When I went, there were only twenty of us blacks, for example. Sixteen went to Olustee, where I met [Mr. Thompson]. Four went to Mississippi. But the whites, some of them went to Louisiana and all. Even then, I remember when we got the white boys talking to them and things. It was not that you would have no **contact**, but **it was a lot of places more than others**.

H: So you were at Olustee as well?

O: Hm-mm [yes], that is where I met him at.

H: Did they explain what sort of work you would be doing at Olustee when you were recruited, or did you have any choice in what camp you could go to?

O: No, you did not have no choice on that, but it was choice of camp. You just

happened to _____ **day** park, federal park, national forest, private forest, whatever. See, so you went. It was a camp, you know, that they sent them to. _____.

H: So did you feel that your experience was pretty faithful to what they had promised you?

T: Yes. Oh yes.

O: What it did was, you learned how to get along with people and you know what work was, if you did not. See, I know, because I come from the farm. You know what work was like in there. Still, I was nineteen when I went, so I was still a young man, never come up the country, so _____.

T: I think when you left the camp, when you left the recruiting station, they put you on a bus and they sent you...we went **to south** Florida to the _____ Church in Columbus. This was an Army base. Now, they will again indoctrinate you as to what the Army expects and what you are supposed to be doing. If not, they will boot you out right then and there, you know, if you get too out of line, so to speak.

O: This is another thing. In Florida, in the beginning, it was only two black camps, Sandestin, Florida, and **Chuluota**. But was not a whole lot of blacks that was going. What did go, they sent them _____. But 1935, they went and expanded, which Olustee is a new camp. _____. With the new camp, _____, it would be a couple of hundred blacks they would send at a time, see, at that time. August was the big month in 1935, July and August, but I did not go until October, so it really was not _____ March 31 and September 30, six months in between. If you went, discharged in March, well, in April then, _____, discharged in September, October.

H: So when did you enroll?

T: I do not know. I do not remember. I had enrolled several times in the CCC. I would get out because you had a time-limit.

O: Yes, six months, it was supposed to be, when they started you.

T: Then, you would get out and go home, and if you could not find a job or you feel like, well, I was making money there and I know what it is all about, I will go back. So I did that three times.

H: Did you go back to Olustee each time?

- T: No. What was the first place I went?
- O: Did you go to Sandestin?
- T: Yes, I went to Sandestin. Sandestin was the first place. After Sandestin, then I went to Hilliard. After Hilliard, I think I went...
- O: Yes, you come to [Olustee]. I remember when you come.
- T: Yes, to Olustee, but the dates I do not remember.
- H: Did you feel there were special efforts to target African-Americans for the CCC?
- T: I do not think there were any special efforts. I think maybe it was just open to anybody who wanted to...
- O: This _____ would take, you know what it was, but like I said, there was not a whole lot of other camps. There was plenty of us to go, but they did, when the expanded. Because I did not go until 1935, but 1933 was when it started in Florida, Sandestin and Chuluota. I think Sandestin was **1441**. You go to **2401**, I believe.
- H: What made you do it? Was it just the economics of it?
- T: The economics. You could not find a job at home. When I quit school, I did not have anything to do, no work or nothing like that, and here was the CCC camp. This is an opportunity. The Depression was on, so what you were trying to do then was help your parents and things, trying to take care of the household. They explained to you about your finances, how that would happen and all like that. Well, when they tell you what you were going to get and what they were going to send home, you would say, golly, mama could do this with this, you know, and mama could do that with that, and all that sort of stuff. You were concerned about the little bit that you were going to get because, I mean, they were going to feed you and clothe you and all that sort of stuff. So, you just went on and signed up.
- O: There was a tragedy on my part. My grandmother raised me. She come up in June, 1935, up to the doctor because she had cancer. _____ and it kept spreading. You know, back then, people would probably be having to go to the doctor _____. But when she did go, that is what it was. Dr. Jones said that. When that started, that is when the **cancer** started, which was twelve years before that. But that was the finding. The medicine, what she had to have, was \$6 an ounce. I went to the lady and talked, explained to her like I am talking to you, and I will never will forget it. That was twelve miles out there in the farm where we stayed, but I convinced her and she drove out there. _____ I

would get a notice in October if I went. Because, see, down in that section, in August, they were building up all around, which was Shady Grove, the camp. But me, I was not even thinking about it then, _____, but they did not tell me exactly what had happened at the beginning. But then when I knowed then, I went to thinking about being sure she got that medicine. The doctor said, he could not cure her and nobody else could, but he could keep her living, and he did. I went and stayed three years, and she went back in 1939, and she died in January of 1940.

H: How much money did you make?

T: A private made, what, \$30 a month, an assistant leader made \$36 a month, and a leader made \$45 a month. In other words, you could advance while you were in the CCCs from a private to a leader if you had the qualities and capabilities.

O: See, it was natural. The company had to have a first sergeant and a mess sergeant. Just so many went with that _____. Now, he was up in it, but I drove a truck. I drove a _____.

H: And how much of that did you have to send home?

O: \$25. Of \$30, which I _____ sent \$25 home. I got \$5, but it was not a problem. That \$5 done me.

T: Like I said, we never thought about what we were going to get. The CCC was going to feed us.

O: See, in the CCCs, just like the Army, the private and all were **members**, assistant leaders and leaders, and **sergeants**. Mess sergeants and the first sergeants were the sergeants in the CCCs. The leader was \$45, assistant leader was \$36. **It was minimum**. Then _____ a truck driver and then them things **carried you as a member** _____, cook, all of them. Then, leaders on detail, because all the crews detailing. Now, you know you would pass by **O'Leno State Park** down there _____, named W. C. _____. He was the forester down there. Do you remember **Jesse Crawford**?

T: Yes, I remember him.

O: I think Jess Crawford _____, but I do not think they had any leaders. There was not many men down there, what he had, but I know Jesse Crawford was assistant leader. Being a truck driver, that is how I know that, because I used to go down to the river there and get the _____ assignment, had to pick up cement or something.

- T: A crew would be assigned certain jobs, you know.
- O: Our camp was **P67**. We were a private park, but then that was a state park. Still, that detail went there.
- H: Did you feel that the CCC, and what you had known about it before you went in, was pretty much how it was when you got in there? Was it pretty faithful to what you were expecting?
- O: I did not have no idea what it was, and it was not really that much thought [to it]. You know, if I could just make _____. You go and get examined and get there, well, I thought I could work and stay, you know. What are you supposed to do? They changed it some. I mean, I stayed long and through the time. But I once I was in, I went and stayed in the same place. But I enjoyed it.
- T: Once you got used to the army regimen, everything was all right. But, you take a guy off the streets or from home or something like that and put him in an army camp, right away he catches hell because he does not know what they expect of him. Incidentally, the first sergeants that we had were real army men, see, so they were hard on us. Boy, you talk about hollering and swearing and jumping. We were just on pins and needles all the time, because you did not know what you were doing wrong.
- O: See, the Army was the CCC. Different projects. They did not care if it was a white camp or a black one or if it was a national forest or a state forest or state park or what, but the CCC and the Army, that was the same. The projects were different, but that was the same.
- H: Were your camps segregated?
- O: Oh yes, _____.
- T: You are in the South. We are not in Ohio, now [a reference to the interviewer's home]. Oh yes.
- O: The commanding officers, everything from the top, **just like** a black camp. The top sergeant was black, the mess sergeant was black. _____, everything was white.
- T: The administrative officers were white.
- O: You know, the doctor and the....
- T: Commander.

- O: The planner's office, first lieutenant, captain or whatever, it was segregated.
- H: In others words, for example in Olustee, there was just one camp and it was black. There was not a black camp over here and a white camp over here?
- O: Black camp at Olustee, white camp at **Ocean Pond**, right across, in the same county.
- T: Exactly. About twelve miles distance, I think, would be a good estimated distance between them, maybe a little more.
- O: You know where we both stayed, you come down there and you turn before you get to Olustee to go around where the camp was. It was on the north side of the lake. It could maybe be that far _____. But ten or twelve miles, anyway, from that.
- T: So, the white camp was there and the black camp was here.
- H: Was there any interaction between the two camps?
- T: Yes, there had to be. I mean, when we were out of flour, we would go over there and get some. We played ball together once in awhile, but it was more or less administrative or a shortage of food, clothing, or whatnot. Once a group of recruits were coming in and they did not have enough clothing, and we had it here at our supply room. They requisition what they wanted over there, and we give it to them. When they get their supplies, they give it back to us.
- H: So, it was pretty reciprocal. It was back and forth.
- T: Yes.
- H: Was there any tension in that relationship?
- T: Once in awhile, you find that. I mean, there were some rednecks in that group that did not like the setup, and so you had a little problem there. By the same token, we had some people who, like me, came from the big city and did not have no dealings with no whites until then. So, you had a little friction. Now, that was not on the base. That was when you were going to town.
- O: See, because it was a white camp at **White Springs**. Actually, the camp that we had at Olustee was white first. Then, they moved _____, just a brand-new camp, you know, for the people, but it had been white. But Ocean Pond was white from the beginning, and White Springs. Then, Sandestin, which still in

Baker County was a black camp. Then, in Nassau County, Hilliard was a black camp.

H: So, did the white camp and the black camp have the same jobs to do in Olustee?

O: Ocean Pond was national forest, same CCC but not the same project. We were over there in Olustee, same CCC but we were private, [camp] P67. They were [camp] F1, Federal 1, over there in Ocean Pond. The CCC deal, what the Army had to do with it, that was there but the projects were different.

H: What were you doing?

O: We put roads and things. See, it was a private forest. At that town, a lot of sawmills, turpentine, cutting roads and things. _____ around Olustee, a guy named **Dan Hower**. He was a big man. He had the turpentine-stills and sawmills, all those things. We cut roads all through there _____. Then, the federal and national forests, they cut roads and _____ in there. But, they did not come out here and do it.

T: Made boundaries for the federal lands, putting up fences and things.

O: Yes, see, take down Ocala National Forest, Osceola, and Apalachicola, three national forests in Florida. Just like I said about when _____ Sandestin _____ up there near Quincy.

T: In the federal camp, I think they did a survey of what is needed in this place that could help another place, like when we got a lot of cows...cows were dying in Texas. I think there was a drought or something.

O: Oklahoma and Texas.

T: So, they were dying, and the ones that were fairly decent, they would send them to Florida because, number one, there was open range at that particular time. Then they got to dying down here, so you had to get rid of them.

O: You know, in those days, in **Hoover days** [when Herbert Hoover was president] when they organized the national forests. That is when _____.

T: Then, you did a lot of...you mentioned the _____, the **pea** services. They had devastated this part of the state as far as logging was concerned. Nobody was planning, replanting, reforesting. So we did a lot of reforesting on private lands.

O: Oh yes. That was, as I believe, the seed trees I planted, _____, 100 down in there at Lake Butler and just between Olustee and the camp, in 1936, we planted

those trees there.

H: Were you ever aware of any white camps that were working for private landowners?

O: White Springs was. It was a private camp. See, it may be just like a federal. Right out on [Route] 441 _____, they called it **4430, F11**. That was a black camp, but it was a federal, you know, a federal forest on this end. Ocean Pond in there, and then Sandestin up there, it was a black camp but it was also a national forest camp. So, whatever work force, it was not limited to where all black went to the federal and all. It was whatever they come up with.

T: Yes, and I am thinking that the administration saw the need for whatever was necessary in a given area. That was the type of projects that they instituted for that particular area.

H: How did you get along with the white administrators in your camp?

T: We got along all right with the white administrators. They had rules to follow, we had rules to follow, and that was it. I mean, as far as you [as] a student and your professors have a same type of situation.

O: Let me tell you one incident, just how segregated it was. See, I drove for the doctor. He took care of Olustee, Ocean Pond, Marietta, which was a black camp this side of Jacksonville, and then the white camp up at Fernandina. I would take him in his truck, and we would go to Marietta, stop there and check in, and I would **carry him on** to Fernandina. See, I could not stay at Fernandina. I would come back to Marietta. Then, the next day, the white people would bring him back to Marietta, and I would bring him to Olustee. You know, but that was the rules. _____. That is the way they did it. Then, if a white driver or something come to our camp, he did not stay over there in the barracks with us. He stayed in the officer's quarters or somewhere else. That was the way it was.

H: When you signed up originally, were there character requirements along with the physical examination?

T: No, I do not think there was. We got a lot of bad boys in there.

O: Just a physical, you know. They had _____, but it was not even if you could not read and write, they would turn you down, but some could not. But if you passed that physical, that did it.

H: What was the physical examination like?

T: Just like the Army.

H: Standard.

T: A standard physical examination.

O: And still like _____ could go, a lot of the little defects somewhere. As long as they figured you could do your job, you know, it was not as strict as the Army.

H: Were you aware of any people who were brought into the CCC instead of going to jail?

T: I do not think that was happening back then.

O: No, they would put you in jail, not CCC, if you done wrong. No, they did not stand no...

T: If you broke the law [on the] outside [of camp], just like he says, you were subject to confinement, in spite of the fact that you were a CCC person.

O: Yeah, they did not play _____. If you did not go by them rules, they would have you on that train. See, back then, the train run through here twice a day and night, you know, four times. You could go that way twice a day and this way twice, and they did not _____, you know, if you broke the rules. One rule was **short** army inspection, they called it. If you had any kind of thing, they would send you home for that, too. This was after you were in there, they would have inspection for that.

H: Were you ever aware of anybody that was brought into the CCC camps against their will?

O: On no, it was you wanting to get there more so than they were wanting to drag you in there. I do not think that ever happened.

T: Had you heard of situations like that?

H: No.

T: That would be like a *Gestapo* [German military] camp then.

O: That is _____ be wanting to go. I do not think **they thought of that**.

H: So you were not given a choice of camps. You only had a certain number you could go to because they were black.

- O: Now, he knows more about this than me, because he was company clerk. My understanding, when a camp broke up, and they were scattering them, sending them here, you could have a choice. But if more want to go yonder, then they would send you where they want to. That is my understanding, that you could have a choice, if a company broke up. You were asked if you wanted to go to another camp.
- H: So, when you enlisted, they said you are going to Olustee...
- T: You go to Olustee, and if Olustee break up, where they were short of people, they had the first choice. After that, then they would send you around to other camps.
- H: Were you doing the same work in these other two camps that you were in Olustee?
- T: The first time I was there as a **cook**.
- O: See, like he said, the first went to Sandestin, _____, so that was different in Olustee. We were a private camp. _____ like Ocean Pond. Now, as far as the work force, they were the same.
- H: So how was the labor different?
- T: Out in the field. Like the projects that we told you about, building roads, building fences...
- O: **Cutting down** trees...
- T: **Dig and plant** and digging fire lines and culverts, I mean, little gullies, drainage and _____.
- O: Then, we had a nursery up there at Olustee. Now, every camp did not have that, but we had a nursery of growing trees, shipped them for other camps wherever they sent them out. Then, we sent out a lot of them. But, we had a nursery up there.
- H: So, it was the turpentine places. That was Olustee. though.
- T: Olustee, yes. You talking about turpentine all over? It was all over this area. That was a form of employment, I guess, or a form of livelihood all over this part of the state of Florida.

- H: But that camp, in particular, was geared towards the turpentine.
- T: Refurbishing the trees and whatnot, at first.
- O: See, that was really the purpose. That is where they get to selecting, or where to send. These private people want roads cut to take their timber. Actually, the trees are already there to start with, but they cut them down and then they replant them.
- H: Did you feel there was a difference in any of the three camps that you were at? Did you feel that they were all pretty uniform in your experience?
- T: Yeah, they were all practically the same. Could not change much. Army rules could not change too much.
- H: How did you feel about the communities that you were near when you were in these camps? Were there good community relationships if you were near a town?
- O: Well, we were in town when we were at Olustee in Lake City, but it was a real rough time. The thing is, I had never had a minute's trouble, none, but a lot of guys did. They got put in jail and this and that and the other. It was not the town, just what you happened to get caught up with or whatnot.
- T: The character of the person determined the kind of people that he associated with, in camp and outside.
- O: Now, when we was down there, they have **White Springs** up there and Ocean Pond, _____. Our side was the north side. You know, it is not now but it was a street. But we never had no problem with a Ocean Pond boy, I never did, but some boy did, but that was a White Springs boy. You know, they **were hitting some**, but you just go into your truck and all. I know somebody, I do not think they went to jail or something or fights. There would always be some....
- T: Harassment.
- O: Yeah, you know, there was some harassment at Ocean Pond.
- T: There were too close to us. You know, we got along very well with Ocean Pond. This camp up here in White Springs, I guess they thought they were superior.
- O: Just like in the street, there were a lot of white people just as good as they could be, and a lot of them, you had to do nothing to them. That is just the way it was.

- H: Did certain camps have a good or bad reputation from what you heard about?
- O: I just remember whenever we was in Gainesville and getting examined. Do you remember _____? Well, I knowed him before we went. Anyway, he—and why, I do not know—said, I just hope they do not send me to Sarasota. So, I do not know why, whether he had heard something about it or not. I had not even at that time heard of Sarasota. I had seen one time in the paper, they said there was twenty-nine camps in the state of Florida, but they did not name them out where and what. I had never heard of Olustee until that day they said we were going to Olustee. But the camp broke up and they put them in and all. So, I do not know how many wound up in Florida. It was probably a lot more than that at that particular time, but that was in that flux at July and August when they were putting in more camps, putting blacks in some camps that were already there and putting some new camps.
- T: I do not think any camp built a reputation where, you know, it was outstanding for any reason at all. You had segregation. You had disciplinary problems. All that happens. No camp escaped any of those kinds of things, because once you get some people together, you are going to have problems. No camp built a reputation as being this or that or the other.
- O: It was more, if any, bad talk, it was the town what you had to go into, more so than the camp itself.
- H: You mentioned that your brother also went into the CCC? Did he go along with you, or did he join you later?
- T: No, he did not join me at all. He just went to a camp somewhere. He was out in the world, so to speak. He had left home, and I did not know he was in the CCC until a little later. Same thing about his Army service. I did not know he was in the Army until a little later. There was a lack of communication between us, him being a wild person in the family. Sometimes, we did not hear from him for three, four, six months sometimes. Then somebody would tell us where he was. Eventually, he would call or write a letter or come by, but he did not stay long. He was just wild, I guess.
- H: Did any of your friends from back home join up with you?
- T: No, not my real friends. A funny thing about this, when I joined up...well, yes, several of my friends joined up with me in the CCC camp. I am mixing up the Army with the CCC now. Yes, quite a few of them joined up with me. We went to the same places, and we had fun together. After we got out, we could talk about our experience back home and things of that nature. Any friends join with you?

- O: Hm-mm. Like I said, I knew _____, but I do not know if you remember him. **Al King**. Them two. I know two before. One of them, _____ I just happened to, I went to Palatka and know him just the year before, 1934. I met him over there.
- H: When you got to the camps, was there any hazing for the rookies coming in?
- O: Yeah.
- T: Yeah. Those old Army people had us going looking for....
- O: All kinds of stuff. Little things, monkey wrenches. All kinds of things, they did do you.
- T: I am trying to think, what was it that we had to get up at night and go down the road, or something like that, and **loop** through two or three times. And it was supposed to come to you, and you bring it back. Oh, it was kinds of things.
- O: Yeah. Sometime, you would be lucky enough. Some guys would kind of tip you off, you know, to not pay attention to everything you hear. But, most of the time, nobody would say a word. You would just be caught.
- T: Oh, I forgot about the hazing.
- H: Once you got to the camp, did you begin to work right away, or was there some sort of orientation period?
- O: Yeah, fourteen days. We had to take shots, vaccinations. We stayed on the yard for fourteen days. Then they called, and you go to the woods or wherever after that. But you stayed, and you cleaned up around there _____.
- H: Some people have suggested, for example, in the CCC camp tied to the turpentine mill, with the black camp being in such close proximity, that African-Americans were exploited for that private land-owner. Would you agree with that, or is that too harsh?
- O: Not with the CCC, but it is a fact that was more black work, that kind of work. As far as the CCC, I do not think. Because we _____ just like whites. It was the same type of camps, ours was, but just in Hamilton County. So, that was not no different. But it was just the fact that white people had been there...
- T: To cleaner jobs, let us say. Turpentine was not a clean job.
- O: What you call _____ and dipping turpentine and all them kind of things. Even most of the stills, black guys running them. Most of the time, the truck driver who hauled that stuff, he was white. It was just a black guy did it.

- H: So there was kind of a hierarchy of the labor in the camps.
- O: Well, that was the thing. A white guy would have a stepson, and you did not work for him and he would do everything. As soon as he got big enough...
- T: He was boss.
- O: He was the boss. You would listen at him.
- T: That was the norm at that time there.
- O: That was just the norm of being black or white.
- H: It was all of society. It was not just the CCC camps.
- O: Yeah, that was just the way society was.
- H: What type of work did you prefer at the camps?
- T: Prefer or assigned?
- H: Either.
- T: Well, you would prefer to sit around and do nothing, like on weekends or when you can come to town or have a good time. That is what you would prefer. But, it was an organization, and it had to be run on an Army standard, let us say. So, you had reports to fill out, you had food and supplies to be requisitioned. Just about everything that you needed, you know, had to have some kind of a record and so forth of that kind of stuff. I mentioned clothing, food, and things like that, gasoline even. Your trucks, your equipment, we had a dynamo there.
- O: Oh yeah. There were two of you, and one would go down and fire it up.
- T: So, you know, all those kinds of things. You had to keep a record of just about everything.
- O: They had inspection on Saturday morning, your shoes shined, your clothes cleaned. Then, we had summer and winter uniforms. Summer, you got your khaki. Winter, you got your wool, heavy jackets, coats. Summer, light jackets. I enjoyed it, really.
- H: Did you feel that certain campers had seniority within the camp?
- T: Sure, we did.

O: We got seniority. That was easy.

T: You got promoted, and you was okay.

O: Yeah, and then assistant leader was above a member, so yes.

H: So, when you moved up that way, how did your responsibilities change?

T: I guess it added responsibilities.

H: Just more of a supervisory role?

T: Supervisory.

H: But doing the same work.

T: Out in the field, yes. I do not think they kept any books or anything on the men out in the field.

O: But the assistant leader or leader out there, he did not _____ like me, as a member. He was out there to see that it was...

T: To see that the job was done.

O: Mostly, I guess, _____ to how many men were there. It generally had one leader and one assistant leader. Some of them did not have one. That was the system. That is out in the field, now. But this _____ is a leader.

H: So, you felt pretty good when you started moving up the ladder that way.

O: Well, if you take me, I liked to drive a truck and that was it. I made what I had, them \$5 do me. See, I did not worry about the other guy getting \$11, or he got \$20. My worry about that \$25 went to my grandma, and that was that. So I managed to do that. Then, I stayed three years and five months, and I missed one day. It was permission then. It was not I just laid off. That is all I missed. In that same time, I made that \$5 do whatever I had to do.

H: How difficult was the work? Was it extremely labor-intensive? How many hours a day did you work?

T: You was out in the field digging ditches or building bridges or something like that. Number one, you were rolling a wheelbarrow full of dirt. You were building grades and all that sort of stuff. It was work, but you had a bunch of young fellas who did

not even know their own strength. So, instead of making it work as work is, they made games of it. They sang funny songs, and they tried to show off with wheelbarrows and stuff like that. Sometimes, they would get hurt but, you know, they had to make it fun in order to get it done.

O: It was different in the forests, with some of the foresters. Actually, our group here worked six hours a day. That was supposed to be the working hours, but sometimes we got _____. Just like O'Leno, see, Olustee was twelve miles there. The speed limit was 30 miles an hour. That is what you drove your truck. But anyway, that is the way it was.

T: You did not work long then because you would spend it on the road.

O: Even if you was cutting a ditch or something, you know, you had to work, but it was not nothing that was going to kill you.

H: What did you do if there was bad weather? Did you get the day off, or did they keep you working?

O: If it was too bad, they did not send you out there. _____, if it was cold, you know. Sometimes, you had to go out there in them cypress ponds and get them telephone poles and things. But, then they had boots _____.

T: Depending on the weather. They did not chain-gang you.

O: And it was not no big deal. You know what you had to do. If you done it, that was all there was to do.

H: Were you ever called in to do any firefighting or to repair hurricane damage?

T: There was a terrible fire. Oh god, that was a terrible thing. Now, that is when you stay out long and hard, trying to kill those fires. They did not have the modern equipment that they have today.

O: No, that was just really handwork.

T: You just had to beat the fire out, get your shovel and throw dirt up and things like that. It was really hard.

H: These were Florida fires? Did they ever ship you somewhere else to fight fires?

T: I think one or two times, some of them went to help another camp.

O: Yeah, probably. _____ went to other camps in Florida, but I do not know for

certain, Sarasota, Sebring, Miami, the Everglades, Starke, Jacksonville, Hilliard, Tallahassee.

H: Can you run me through a typical day at camp?

T: You want to carry him through a day out in the field?

O: I started out there before I drove the truck. We was cutting a ditch, the first thing. The third day I was out there, old **Fred Cullum** was there, a forester. He was what we called **hard rock** _____. He was tough. Anyway, I am just off the farm. I was nineteen. I was not too big. I did not weigh but 122 pounds when I went. Anyway, I was a beginner, so he asked me in about a week or two, could I drive a truck? Because, **he said, we have this opening**; take the examination and you can drive a truck, if you want to. That is what he done, so I was not there too long. Then, six months before I left, I **decided then that I just would drive for this doctor**. So, the last six months that I was in there, I drove for the doctor. We went to Fernandina. I would carry him to Fernandina, and I come back to here. I enjoyed it all, in the truck, and I went to a lot of other camps that [Mr. Thompson] probably did not because I drove to Silver Springs and _____. We had a camp in Mulberry. It was a private camp there. That is what we did. Now, in the work force, it was not the same equipment that Ocean Pond had for that **forest**. White Springs, they were the same we was, so that is the way you did it. See, it is still up there out toward Jacksonville on 90, in the CCC, that was **the central** repair shop. That was where they repaired CCC trucks, these private trucks, not the National Forest, just the private. They brought the trucks from Mulberry or Silver Springs, wherever [there was] a private camp. They brought the trucks from all over.

H: Were there any new skills that you took from your experience at the camps that you used later on?

O: No, not really. I learned a lot, seeing what they done, but I mostly drove trucks. At the time, that was _____ that much. We had a tractor, a grader to grade up them roads we were cutting. You see them do it _____.

T: But, you had to make them _____ with that flat square **shovel**. You took pride in making it straight and all that sort of stuff.

O: You could take a shovel and grade a road. We done that a lot of times.

H: Were the skills that you learned at the camp new skills that helped you later in life?

- T: Yeah. In high school, I think I had taken up a little course in the typewriting. It was just what you call a fill-in course, you know, just take it for the hell of it. So, when I got in the CCC camp, I went out in the field just like they did at first, just like he was telling you. Then, they found out through the educational program that they had that I could type a little bit. So then they made me an understudy to the secretary. I had it easy. Like I say, it was a good move. After he left, then I got to be the secretary.
- H: Was that a full-time job, or was that in addition to the work?
- T: No. When they make you an understudy, you just stay in there and work with him and run errands. You are the gopher then, see.
- H: Did you ever run out of work? Were you ever bored?
- O: No.
- T: No, you could not be bored. Remember now, it is an Army camp. There is always something going on. Sometimes, you look back and you say, well, we did some real good things. For instance, during the Depression, a lot of people was moved from place to place. I mean, walking. Bill told you there was railroads through this area here, and down by Olustee, there was the main track, the main east-west track off of there. So we had a lot of visitors coming in, and the food that we had left over and things like that, we just gave it to them. Then the word got around. If you go through Olustee, stop at that CCC camp. See what I mean? So, we had a problem there for awhile, but we managed to take care of it real well. So, there was always something to do. We had the National Park right across the way. We had some people walk over there. Where they have the Olustee battle every year now, we had a group to walk over there and work over there.
- O: Because, see, that was after Ocean Pond disbanded. They broke it up before we did that. Then, a group from over here, it was still Olustee National Forest but still the men were _____. I believe old _____ was the leader over there, but anyway, that is the way they done it.
- H: Describe your camp. What were the conditions like, and did you have barracks, plumbing, electricity?
- O: You had a washhouse and then a big old toilet out there. **They had to call the guards** when you _____, but he would burn that, you know, keep that clean out there, the bathhouse and all of them things out there. But, it was the old manual deal. I do not think they had no kind of sprinklers. I don't know how that bath deal went, but I remember the old toilet.

T: They had homemade showers, five or six of them on a row like that on both sides. You go in there, and you wash off right quick and get on out of there.

O: _____ **how they expect me to just** _____.

H: Did you feel like the barracks and the camp conditions were equal to the white camps that you saw? Were they fairly equal in upkeep?

T: I think they were. There was not too much difference. They had a little more privileges as far as spreading out some of their things was concerned. For instance, one or two times, I saw where...your footlocker is the foot of your bed, and they had some kind of a velvet covering over their footlockers. We did not have that. I do not know whether it was permitted or not, but anyway, we did not have that. In other words, they dressed up their footlocker. We did not dress up ours because we had to keep them...

O: I think that was just their own doing.

T: Yeah, their individual [doing] there.

O: I remember in White Springs, after they was there, they made **something they was running in that river up there**, you know. They had flush-toilets after _____ whenever they broke up and they had to remove it. See, they move it into California, White Springs. They moved them out to California, in 1937, I believe it was. Anyway, just like the trucks and a lot of things, they did not _____ some of the guys _____. **Loud mufflers** on their trucks and all, you know.

T: Individualized things, you know.

O: _____ they did their own _____ like that. If you want to _____ make a loud muffler on it. We called them at that time **gut** _____ mufflers. _____, but you can do that if you want.

H: How was camp discipline administered?

T: Well, if you did a certain thing, you got punished. If you broke the rules, you just got punished. The severity of the punishment depends on the severity of your crime. You give somebody, what, two hours of scrubbing the garbage cans. You give another person two hours raking the back area. You know, just little things to let them know that....

O: They would be on the woodpile, cutting wood or something.

- T: Yeah. Let them know that they should not have done it, and you give them something to do to compensate for it.
- H: Was anyone ever expelled from the camps for anything they did?
- T: Expelled? You remember the truck that run over somebody? No, that was at Sandestin, I believe.
- O: No, _____ backed over a guy. They did not discharge him for that because the guy was laying back down, you know, why? They went through, but they did not for that. But, any wrongdoing, you know, like if you get in a fight, it just depends. Now, I remember one time that nursery bunch, just like he said, we used to walk over to the National Forest _____. We would line up and walk to that nursery every day. Back then in the 1930s, there was a lot of moonshining, and some guy had hid some moonshine. Some of them guys found it, and some of them did not ever get to the nursery. They got drunk and all. So, any one of them they caught, they sent them home. Things like that, you know.
- H: Did the CCC workers make moonshine on the side?
- O: No, these were bootleggers. They just hid it, and these guys were walking to work and found it.
- T: Moonshine was the savior of the people. You know, as far as a little money is concerned.
- O: Daddy said moonshine would sell better than groceries back then.
- T: Exactly. Because, I mean, after you work all the week, you sharecrop and you work all the week and you come home and you got nothing, you get **stressful**. You want to do something, so you go get a drink of moonshine and that is it. That is where the grocery money goes, too, see? So, it was a big thing. In fact, not too long ago, I think they broke up the last of the big moonshiners, no more than ten or fifteen years ago down in that area, the Sandestin area.
- O: But you go into Arcadia now, you seen the people where they get a still, they did not go on **for good**. They brought the big boys back, but they still...even that long ago. The way it was, and still now.
- T: Well, it is illegal in Florida, but it is legal in Georgia. You can go in any liquor store and buy moonshine in Georgia, but in Florida, they used to take advantage of the people because they put a lot of junk together and it caused a lot of problems health-wise.

- O: This moonshine, the kind the citizens still out there, it goes as legal moonshine. They call it moonshine, and it probably is, and these guys probably make it and sell it to them. It is just as much against the law in Georgia of this moonshine still that it is in Florida, the old regular still, when you were talking about the breakup.
- T: So, the moonshine you buy is legal stuff.
- O: Yeah, it is legal stuff. Well, you get it out the bar room, but the whiskey you buy from honky-tonks out there...
- T: Oh, it is still illegal.
- O: Yeah, that is what I am talking about, illegal. In Florida, I do not know about it being _____, but I believe this place in Florida, you can still buy that kind of moonshine from the bar room.
- T: I never heard of any, but then you may be right.
- O: But I have heard that now. I can not pinpoint, but I have heard of that moonshine in the bar room.
- H: We should do a little research trip.
- T: Well, if I liked it, I probably would not know where it is.
- O: It has been so long now.
- H: What kind of stuff did you do for fun while you were in the camps, on your time off?
- T: We played ball. We competed against each other at horseshoes, ball-playing. We had tennis court, we had a baseball diamond, and things. Then, if you developed a pretty good team, then you could go around and visit with other little communities and whatnot, and play baseball or whatever.
- O: And they had a recreation hall. There were guys who wanted to play cards, checkers, pool. They had pool tables.
- T: Ping-pong, all kinds of things.
- H: Did you ever organize dances?
- T: Yeah, that was the big thing. That was a big social thing in our camp, and I guess the same thing happened in the other camps also. But, they would organize something, maybe three times a year or something like that. Then, they would

invite all the young ladies from the nearest towns to come to these camps, and we would furnish transportation to and from. We would have a nice time.

H: Did you get a pretty good turnout from the ladies?

T: Oh yes, it was always a gala affair. That was what made the local boys so angry with the CCC boys, because here all the girls were flocking to the CCC boys. We had \$5 to spend that they did not have.

H: When you went into town, what did you usually end up doing?

T: Dancing at the dance halls. Sometimes just walking the streets, just looking.

O: Go to the picture show. That was one of the big things.

T: If you want to shop, uptown shopping, and whatever things like that. The biggest things, as far as we were concerned, there were several restaurants and you just spent a lot of time talking and visiting around.

H: Getting away from camp.

T: Just getting away from there.

O: _____ on the holidays _____ trip to go to Jacksonville, so **some of them** _____ go to Jacksonville. I believe that **sure did not that many want** to go to Jacksonville, but they went on holiday to the beach and _____.

H: Did you ever read the CCC newspaper? Was it made available to you?

T: What was the name of the newspaper?

H: *Happy Days*.

T: *Happy Days* was one, yes. We had that. We had several articles in one of them.

H: That you submitted?

T: No, I did not. We had an educational advisor. What was his name? Davis. Davis wrote several articles to the camp newspaper about our camp, you know, the accomplishments that we had done and named several individuals and so on and so forth.

O: That was one thing. In the beginning, there was a white educational advisor, but as it went, then a black educator. So, he was the one that **worked with the**

sergeant. So, that was one black man. In the beginning, always the assistants were the blacks, and the whites _____. **Mr. Rich**, when I first went there, he was the educational supervisor.

H: What sort of education did they offer? They had classes you could take, **[for] illiteracy?**

T: If you remember, we said something about the fellows coming from the farms, sharecropping and all that sort of stuff...They did not have much education, and some of them were just as ambitious as anybody to try to improve their lot. So, they would have little reading classes, writing classes and things like that, see, and one man supervised the whole thing. So it was kind of a close relationship they had, and he took time with you.

O: It had to kind of be individual, what was there. Everything at that time, both Jacksonville and Lake City _____ **went out there.** They had _____ could read.

H: So, it was more like literacy classes than, say, vocational-type classes.

O: Yeah, whatever you _____.

H: Did they have religious services at the camp?

T: Yes, they did.

O: They would bring **men to the** church in town.

T: Ministers would come in and give religious services. We even developed two or three little ministers in the group ourselves, among the boys. As I grew older, I could not understand the difference between the white and the black. It seemed to me they were all striving for the same thing, and that was the bettering of their condition. We had people who were ambitious to be this, that, or the other, and [who] worked on their ambitions. And we had ministers, _____ ministers.

O: We had a _____ **quartet.**

T: Yeah. We had a baseball team that was out of this world, so to speak. Beat everybody around in this area. You would go to these various little communities and whatnot, and you are accepted in those communities, especially like that group that he was talking about. I mean, anywhere they go, they would draw a crowd.

H: From what I understand, 500,000 CCC members actually ended up deserting. Did you ever have any thoughts of doing that?

T: Did I have thoughts of deserting the CCC?

H: Yes.

T: Why?

H: Somehow, I tend to think the figures for the black camps would be different for that [desertion rate].

T: Yes. The only reason the blacks would...the only reason I would desert—obviously I do not know about anybody else—was the fact that they did not listen to, oh, I might have been sick and they did not give me the treatment I wanted. I needed it someplace else, and so I went home. That is the only reason I know of.

H: Did you get sick at camp?

T: Yes.

H: How were the medical facilities?

T: We had a first-aid station with one or two beds in it. If you got sick, you went to the first-aid station. I think they called it the infirmary.

O: But **the VA hospital happened to be** _____ Lake City, where the _____ if you are sick _____.

T: That is right. We had a person on duty out there as a...what was **Alan Green**?

O: First-aid attendant.

T: Yes. He could put a band-aid on you, things like that.

O: Then, the doctor, this particular one where I would go, he stayed in Olustee, but if he did not stay there, there would always be a doctor come there, you know, maybe once a week or twice or whatever. But that is the way we would see the doctor.

T: I am trying to think of that doctor's name that was from Miami. We happened to cross paths there in Olustee. He was from Miami, I was from Miami, and I had known him down there for some reason. I guess maybe he treated some men from around there. So we put the two stories together and got to be real good

friends. Anyway, medical attention was not far away. You always had it on hand.

H: But it was inadequate for your needs.

T: Well, no, it was really adequate. I mean, they could get you to it. Like he said, the VA hospital was there...

H: Well, when you got sick, is that where you ended up going? Did you say you went home?

T: If you got sick enough, yes. Now, we are talking about deserting, when I say you got sick enough and you felt like nobody was doing anything for you, you get depressed and all that sort of stuff, more homesick than anything else. So, you just go home.

O: Through the time, I believe the most that went, it was their first go there and [they would] leave and go on back.

T: Homesick.

O: But, there was not no crime for that. If you went on back, ain't nobody look for you. That is my knowings. Even before I ever went, guys in that August deal, what went, was back.

T: Came back home.

O: _____ going, these guys done walked **out**. That is my theory now, but I guess it **was not they done** a crime or something. They still left, but that would actually be the law, if you broke a law, you know.

H: Why did you end up leaving the CCC?

O: Because my time was out.

H: Three years?

O: Well, actually when I went, two years was the time, but before that time was out, they extended it. So I stayed another eighteen months. But, it was up this time, so I left. I left him there because he had another extension on some special thing. I do not know. He will have to speak for that.

T: The war came. The camp was breaking up. They were sending some of us down to **Cape Sable**, which is near home. So, I went down to Cape Sable with the group. Down there, it seemed like we got a new command or something.

Anyway, they tried to put more restrictions on us down there. Do you know where the Everglades National Park is? Okay, in that area is where we were bivouacked. I do not know whether he was a captain or a lieutenant, but this officer seemed to want to put more restrictions on us. We had a truck going to town every day, going to Miami every day, and I guess maybe I wanted to go. He felt like I needed to be around, sitting around doing nothing, so I left from there.

O: Did you ever go to Tallahassee and then come back there, or you left before they went to Tallahassee?

T: No, I did not go to Tallahassee.

O: Okay, you done left.

H: Was there any sort of leave policy, for emergencies, or just only weekend liberties is all you got?

T: I know there was a leniency on sickness in your family or things of that nature because you could go home for X number of days.

O: I think a week. You know, you could get a week or _____ with the weekends. You would have five days and two days, with the pay, see. But, you stayed off without _____. A lot of times, they would not do nothing to them, but you still did not get paid that day. **Being a member**, well, \$1 was that day. For the assistant leader, that was \$1 and something, I do not know.

H: What is your view on the fact that the CCC was segregated?

O: Well, everything else was.

T: That was the time.

O: Yeah, that was just standard everyday influence. I mean, you take the war, when it started, it was just the same _____ as uptown. It was.

T: It was just the times.

O: I know right then, they started **filling out** _____ **men, and** _____. He was the Pontiac automobile dealer. And **Sunny Jones**, you know _____. Most of the big men out there now _____. You could get what they called a classified labor job. You could get _____, and that is the way it was. These black men could not even get a **train** out there. Now, in Jacksonville and a lot of them bases, blacks did **ride** _____, but out there, classified labor _____.

- H: Did you feel like there were any sort of racial tensions in the camps? Now, like you said, that was sort of the temper of the times.
- T: In which camp? The black camp?
- H: Any.
- T: I do not know about the other camps, but I do know there was nothing to be racial about in the black camp.
- H: Sure, but you said that certainly there were some run-ins, however minor, with the white camps across the way.
- T: Downtown. Those were individuals.
- H: Right, that is what I am talking about. I do not mean whole camps or anything like that.
- T: Well, there would have been a war if something like that happened.
- O: Yeah, that was not _____. It was just, like I said...
- T: Individuals. One or two people.
- O: Around that **courthouse** there, we was over here. Ocean Pond around that side. White Springs there. But Ocean Pond never had no problem there, but some of them would get in arguing [and] shouting match with them White Spring [guys]. I never been there, and it happened just _____. But, you know, you just had a guy talking. I never had no competition one way or the other.
- H: The CCC in its own time was controversial, as I am sure you well know. Do you ever recall people branding it as either fascist or socialist?
- T: No, we were in an area where any help that anybody could get was welcome. WPA [Works Progress Administration; New Deal program] and NRA [National Recovery Act; New Deal program] and all that was welcome around in this area here. So, we did not have that problem.
- O: All my **reasoning** about it was the CCC is **one of the** _____ was the least one criticized because it helped, being, you know, the mayor of Seattle, Washington, was a former CCC. You know, I am just naming some. Sammy, you remember the school superintendent, **Rump**?

T: Rump? Yes.

O: He was a former CCC.

T: It was welcome in this area here, I know. Well, in Florida, I believe it was welcome.

O: I've never heard much criticism of the CCC.

T: Like, you hear more praise for the CCC as one of the best projects of the New Deal that came our way. [End of Side 2, Tape A.]

H: What did you like and/or dislike about your experience in the camps?

O: Me, myself, I can go through the place from beginning to the end. I can remember just like it was the first night I got there. I got there at eleven. Well, the train come in at eleven o'clock. I had never heard them dynamos roaring right there. The light strung all around there. Got up the next morning _____ all that corned beef and grits and coffee and milk. That was it. It was right on. I ain't got a _____.

T: I do not have any dislikes about the CCC because it was a situation where if you followed the rules, you had no problems. I do praise the CCC because I had found out, after CCC life, that those who were in the CCC, whether they were friends of mine or just in the CCC, I found out that they turned out to be real good soldiers while I was in the service. See, so the training that I got in the CCC, plus what they got also, made for a good adaptation into the armed services.

H: Why do you think that was? Just because you were more accustomed to being disciplined?

T: Because you were more accustomed. That is [it] exactly.

O: They tried back then to make the CCC permanent, just like the Army, but they never could _____. They did make it permanent for thirty-five years. Now, the war come, but that is in **19**__, would have been them thirty-five years if nothing had happened. But, they never did make it permanent, you know, just like the Army or the Navy and things like that. They did, at that time, make it permanent for thirty-five years, but it went out of business in a little under ten years when _____.

H: Do you feel like the reputation that the CCC has as one of the best parts of the New Deal is deserved?

T: Yes.

O: Oh, I would.

T: Very much. Yes, sir. If you talk about the CCC to anybody who has been in the CCC, you would hear praises. You do not have criticisms. Now, that does not mean that it was a bed of roses, you know, all the time, but you hear praises more than you hear criticism. What they are trying to do now is revive the old CCC boys into a, well, they do have a national organization whereby they are trying to get Congress to even set up some kind of statute or some kind of something up there in Washington for the CCC boys. It was a good organization while it lasted.

H: Do you think that we would benefit from another CCC today?

O: It would not work today.

T: You could not do it.

H: Are people too spoiled today?

T: That is it. I mean, the laws have changed and all of that. All the things that have changed, you could not do it.

O: They just could not have it under control like it was. _____ they were in control then. You know, there are always going to be a few, but that was not often. _____. You take this bunch now _____.

T: Look at the Army today, and look at the Army back then. That gives you some comparison as to whether you can do it now, you know, with a bunch of civilians coming in and then going in under that same regimen. You just could not do it. They hardly can keep the Army straight now.

H: Well, certainly, you talked about how the CCC prepared you for your military service, but did you take things from the CCC which helped you for the rest of your life after the war?

T: I would imagine that the fact that I do not complain too much has something to do with it. You accept things as they are in most cases, and you work with what you got. Through life, you know you are not going to have everything going your way, but then do not let it get to you. You can fight it if you want to, but do not let it get to you. That is my philosophy in life: accept what I see and move on.

H: You fought in the war?

T: I did not fight in the war.

H: Served?

T: I served in the war.

H: Which theater?

T: American theater. I stayed in the United States. I did not go overseas.

O: Now, I was never called up to the military.

H: Doing more typing like you were and gophering like in the CCC?

T: Yes, the same things. It helped, the experience that I got in the CCC camp got me a lot of good things, a lot of goodies, in the Army. I was home a lot of times when I was not supposed to be here, and all that.

H: Did your family find that you had been changed because of the CCC, do you think?

T: You mean from the bad boy that I was? Actually, I never have been a bad boy, but I think they might have seen me settling in mind. As I grew older, instead of being wild like my brother was, I was settled more.

H: Why is the CCC significant to American history today?

T: Because, number one, it changed the attitude of a lot of young men during that period. It opened avenues for a lot of young men in later years, but the most important thing was it helped them when they needed help the most, and that was during the Depression. You would be surprised. You should have been—no, you should not have been—you saw the [motion] picture “Grapes of Wrath”? Do you remember how they would load up on that old truck and try to make it from Oklahoma? That is the way it was, and multiply that by 100,000 people and you got what it was like back then. See, we did not have the Dust Bowl, but we had the famine. The cotton was not growing. The [boll] weevils had taken over that. The corn was not growing. The weevils were taken over that. All kinds of things were happening during that time. When the CCC came along, it was a godsend. It was a godsend.

O: Then, it put you to thinking, now. I mean, you know ain't nobody would never do a thing if you will never stop thinking about what, one way or the other. If you just do what _____ I have thought about hurting somebody. But you never thought not to do it. So that is the thing. You got to have a direction you want to

go. If you do not _____ just said you are going to kill everybody else because you can. You just got to move over a little bit and just keep going.

H: Do you feel like the CCC has any special significance for the African-Americans who were enrolled?

T: Yeah. I think a lot...I mean, he [Mr. O'Neal] came out. He developed into a successful businessman, and now he is retired and comes to my house whenever he feels like it, whenever I call him to come. I mean, we have been good friends for years and years and years. And there were others around. Of course, a lot of them have expired since then. But I think maybe what I just said is multiplied in a lot of communities around the nation. So, it had a big influence on it.

O: And one of the things _____ I have been and everywhere you go _____ CCC just look like a family, you know. You **never see any but these CCC members, you read** about them. I guess that is just one of the things in my life that I am glad I experienced.

T: Yeah, if you go to any one of the parks, any place where the CCCs have been and left a building or something like that, and if you are an old CCC member, when you get in there, you start looking up. Boy, a lot of things happen right there in your vision. It is wonderful.

H: You feel connected to it.

O: I went in 1985 to **Griffin Park**, went in there and they got these **things**. You look all around, and you keep looking around. Here is an **old wall**. The CCCs built that park years ago. That is just one thing, but there are certainly other little things. You go back home and look to the left there, that O'Leno State Park down there. Then, before you get there, just where that **tower is built out there at _____ Creek**. They built that tower. I was still driving for the forest when we built that tower. Now, I do not know, after I was gone, they built that at Olena or not, but the one out here in _____ Creek, going into **Raiford** down there, that one and Union City before you get _____, them three that I helped build.

T: So there is an influence. Any CCC person will tell you that if they get around anything that has any connection with the old CCC, it brings back a lot of fond memories. You may not even be anywhere near that area, but the fact that the CCC was involved connects you, too.

O: And you can tell. You heard in Union County any of these things. Even in Georgia, you can go out there and you can tell them old CCC roads. You can tell them.

- H: Is there anything that I should have asked you that I did not? Anything about camp life, about life back during the Depression, that I should know about that you want to share? Any particular memories or anecdotes from being in the CCC?
- T: Well, I think we gave you just about everything in bits. Now, you probably have to pick out what we said if you want to categorize. I think we covered just about everything, the recreation, covered the food, which was plentiful, simple but plentiful. We covered the clothing, the Army clothes...
- O: It is just like out here. You know, you make life _____. Unless there is something to get in the way, you got to show us the way you want to go, and if you are lucky, you...and if you are not, you know, it is just something that gets in the way. You could make friends or you could...every guy who come in there did not say. I mean, like a _____. Some come in here and had the wrong place to start with, and they would go on back. Then, there was some saying, now, I did not know, you know, you worked with him out there at _____ or you had a buddy _____. I did not even know until just before he died that he had ever been in there, but he had a bad experience, I understand. So, that _____ what, I do not know, but I do not think _____.
- H: What did you end up doing after you left the Army?
- T: Came to work at the **VA**.
- H: Were there a lot of other CCC members there?
- T: Not a lot of them, but there were several...
- H: Here and there.
- T: Yes, but not a lot of them. A lot of the old CCC members had left this area by then. They went to different places, especially the blacks headed south from here, because after the CCCs, the **villain** of the Army carried a lot of contractors various places. They were going looking for the contractors with the best jobs, and a lot of them would sign them. I saw **James Davis**, from Suwannee Valley, at the funeral last week, **Ms. Beatrice Johnson's** funeral.
- O: **I do not remember**. I mean, you said James. Is that one of **the bishop's** brothers?
- T: Related to him, yes.

O: The name sounds familiar, but I do not think I know him.

T: Yes, I saw him. He came up to that funeral. But, what I am trying to show is the fact that a lot of people who were in this area at that time have left this area, and some of them were doing real well. For instance, when they leave here, they go to these contractors, and they stick with them until they finish this project. Then, when they get the contract to that, they finish this project and he got another project. He goes on. They wind up just about everywhere sometimes. In North Carolina. I got a nephew by marriage who is in North Carolina. He got stuck up there after the contractors and everything.

O: That is **Randall**?

T: Randall. He just stayed, so that is his home there. I assume that he is living pretty good.

H: Have you stayed active with, sort of, the national reunions that the CCC members still have? There is that group that meets in Gainesville. I went to one meeting.

T: There is a letter on the table there now from...

H: Is there? There is a meeting next Saturday, right?

T: Yes. I have not been to a one of them since I joined. I did join and I did keep up my membership and all that, but there was always something in the way that I could not attend the meetings. So, I have not been, but my membership is still there. They send me the minutes and things, and so forth and so on.

H: I guess there was one in Inverness, too. Did you ever know about that one?

T: Yes. At one time, we had planned to go to Inverness. Is that where the national cemetery is?

O: Bushnell.

T: Bushnell, okay. I did not know about the one in Inverness, but it seems to me like we had planned to go down there and then go to Bushnell for some big day or something, CCC dedication day or something that they were having down there. But, I did **not** go.

H: Okay. Well, if you cannot think of any other memories you would like to share—this is your last chance—have we covered it pretty well here?

T: I think we did.

O: I enjoyed every minute of it. I do not regret it a bit. I happened to be going to Olustee. I went back to the farm the rest of that year, and then the next year I went to Tampa **when some of the first concrete was poured on MacDill Field.** I was there **back then.** I worked construction right on up until I retired.

H: Well, gentlemen, I thank you for your time. I appreciate this, and this concludes the interview.

[End of Interview.]