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(Interviewee, print) (Interviewer, print)

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(Interviewee's signature)
Address M C Bannier
25260. Rd 45 Section A1 35771
Phone (205) 224-3398

Date 3-26-96

Adam Boozer
(Interviewer's signature)
Address 174 county Road
649 Mentone A1 35984
Phone (205) 634-4805

Date 3-26-96

Interviewee Background Information

Name: G.C. Barrier
Address: 257 County Rd 45 Section, Al 35771
Phone Number(s): 205 228-3398
Approximate age or date of birth: August 9, 1920
Mother's name: _____
Father's name: _____
Places lived and when: Harden County, Tennessee 1920-1941, Macedonia
Alabama 1941 until now

Education: Very little

Religion: Baptist
Business, political and social memberships (past and present):
Ran a business of Saw Milling

Present occupation: Retired
Former occupation(s): Saw Miller, Farmer, TVA

Special skills: Saw Milling
Major Accomplishments: _____

Local events in which you have participated: none

State and/or regional events in which you have participated: none

National events in which you have participated: none

International events in which you have participated: none

Natural born U.S. citizen? (Yes) No
Naturalized Citizen: Yes/No Date: _____
Country from which you emigrated: _____
Documents, photographs, and artifacts, which are in your possession:
Mostly Old tools and family photos

Individuals you recommend who might be candidates for an oral history interview: _____

Additional information: _____

G.C. Barrier, An Oral History

**Adam Boozer
History 442
April 1, 1996**

G.C. Barrier, An Oral History

As a child growing up on Sand Mountain in a tiny little spot in the road called Macedonia, I was able to meet and get to know many interesting people. Among them was my great uncle G.C. Barrier. I have known G.C. all my life. I grew up in a house that sat directly across a corn field from where he and his wife Flora lived. I chose to do this interview and oral history project on G.C. because I feel that he has lived an extremely simple, and at the same time interesting life. Much of the information that is included in the interview has previously been given to me by my father in bits and pieces over the years. G.C. has been like a second father to my dad and like another grandfather to me. My dad and I both really enjoy just sitting around and talking to him. I think he has really been a good role model for both of us. He has many great stories that might cover any number of topics ranging from politics to sports(two things that are more closely related than one might imagine). By doing this interview I got to hear the first hand accounts of these stories, and I even got to hear two or three that I had never had the privilege of hearing before. Whiz, as some call him, has lived a relatively simple life, he has worked hard and seems to be content with what he has gained and what he has accomplished. He has done as much as anyone could ask of themselves, he found something at which he could excel and he has truly gone out and made the best of the opportunity. Sure, his family suffered through hard times just like anyone else, but with years of hard work determination and skill, sawmilling is how G.C. made a decent living for his family. He also had several other jobs such as farming that will be discussed later on in the paper, but the thing he was best at was sawmilling. Just ask anyone around Macedonia, or on Sand Mountain for that matter, just about everyone knows him. Almost anyone you ask will tell you that he can saw a straighter board than anyone they

know. Those who know him, when asked, will associate him with two things, hard work and of course sawmilling. He is a very generous man, who will treat you just about as well as he expects you to treat him. I have always admired him. I was truly honored when he agreed to do this interview. He is a very easy person to get along with, and very easy to talk to. I almost neglected to mention the fact that on the day that the interview was conducted, I was treated to a bowl of hot, fresh sweet potato cobbler. It was truly delicious. The cobbler was compliments of G.C.'s wife Flora and the undisputed queen of cobblers, Imogene Culpepper.

G.C. Barrier was born in Harden County, Tennessee, on August 9, 1920. He began his first job at a sawmill at twelve years of age in 1932. The timber industry was becoming more and more widespread in the south, and it was looking to be the best way of making money. He told an interesting story of a job he had shortly after he began sawmilling. Many of his friends had told him about a man who ran a sawmill in the area. They said that he was very hard to work for and hard to get along with. G.C. decided to go to the man and ask about getting a job working for him. He explained to me what the man said to him. The man just stood, looking at him for several minutes "before you start to work for me, I'm gonna tell you one thing, you will have to suit me in every way, and I don't care if I suit you in no way. Do you want a job? I said yes". This is what the man said to him. Just after this exchange, the man hit his thumb with a hammer and he raised up and threw the hammer as far as he could. He told G.C. to go and get it. He ran and got the hammer. G.C. worked for the man for several years and they got along fine. He said that the man really treated him well.

G.C.'s parents had both died when he was very young so he had to provide for the family. In 1941, the family decided to move to Macedonia Alabama. His job was what brought them here. Sawmilling had brought G.C., his younger brother Dewey, and their two sisters Rachel and Delphy to Alabama. Rachel was the oldest and she tended to

the household duties. G.C. worked and provided the family's income. G.C. has lived in the same general area since he came to Alabama. He married Flora Culpepper in 1941, they had one child and then G.C. was called away to war. He was in the army for about eighteen months. He told me that Flora and their new son Uvon had a rough time while he was away, as did most everyone else. when G.C. returned home he immediately began sawmilling again. He also began farming. He continued to combine both farming and sawmilling all throughout the years and still does both now. He stressed however, that he always made more money at sawmilling, and he wasn't really sure why he had kept farming for so many years. I asked him about farming and what kind of crops he raised. He told me that he raised mainly cotton. This was about all that anyone raised. I asked him about the decline of cotton in the area. He told me that the last decent cotton crop that he had was in 1965. After that, cotton virtually faded out completely in the area. He couldn't seem to explain why but it just did. Even though cotton had faded out, G.C. kept farming. He began raising corn and soy beans and this is what he has raised ever since. Again, he could not explain why he kept farming. He just did.

In 1950 G.C. purchased his own sawmill. He told me about moving their equipment around from place to place. they just took the sawmill into the woods each time and started cutting. This allowed them to cut quickly and they could also cut the timber quicker. I asked him about injuries and if he had ever seen anyone get injured. He has never seen anyone get seriously injured. Although he had a cousin that had been killed just down the road when he got his foot caught in a belt. He stressed safety and the fact that you had to always be careful and watch what you were doing. He told me that a man could get killed in an instant by a sawmill if he didn't respect the power of the machine. He explained how he has cut timber from all over Sand Mountain and as far south as Gadsden. When I asked him how he knew which trees to cut, he just grinned and told me that picking out what to cut was the easiest thing that they did. In my

research I have found that there are several methods of "cruising timber"¹. Some used the lump estimate, average tree, and the hundred percent methods. I did not mention any of these to G.C. I am sure that his method is some sort of combination of these, but he probably has never heard of any of them. According to my father and several other people that have known G.C. for a long time, G.C. could tell by looking at the timber he was planning to cut, how many feet of lumber it would produce of it. This fact amazes me. A man with little or no education that can figure like this, but there is no doubt that it is true. G.C. seemed to enjoy talking about his brother, Dewey. During the interview, he told me about how all of Dewey's education took him only six or seven years total, which included two college degrees and military service. I knew Dewey, personally, he was a minister and probably the most intelligent man I have ever known. Dewey would have made the ultimate candidate for an oral history, but unfortunately he is no longer with us. It made me respect G.C. even more to know how modest he was about his own ability and how proud he had been of his brother, Dewey. He looked after his younger siblings as if he had been their father and in a way he had. He was very proud of them.

I asked G.C. about lumber prices. He told me that when he was cutting lumber full time, prices were good. He said, that they were good for the time and that things did not cost as much then as they do now. Minimum wage was sixty cents an hour and lumber brought sixty dollars per one thousand board feet. He compared that to a four dollar and twenty-five cent minimum wage now and lumber prices of two hundred dollars for one thousand board lumber feet. Lumber has not increased nearly as much as minimum wage has over the years. After saying this, G.C. said, "figure the rest out yourself".

¹Weaver, Howard and Aderson, David A. Manual of Southern Forestry. Interstate Printers and Publishers. Danville, Illinois, 1954.

Many books that I have read, tell several different methods of marketing and selling timber. One particular book talks about contracts and lump sales or bulk sales, etc.² I kind of figure that G.C. and everyone else around the Sand Mountain area at the time, had one system that they all went by and it was not nearly as complicated as those.

We talked about modern ways of cutting timber. Today, they use machines called skidders, to go in and cut down the trees. These machines cut almost all the timber in an area down and everything else is destroyed. G.C. told me that there were places on Sand Mountain that he had cut timber from four times over the years. Most of these places could be cut again now. The way things are done now, they are lucky if they can ever cut the lumber from the same place a second time. G.C. said, he has seen the way they do things now and that they do not touch anything with their hands. Machines cut, load, and haul all of the timber. He seemed to me to be resentful that people don't have to work as hard now as he did. G.C.'s son is in the trucking business and he has began hauling logs almost all the time, because it pays so well. G.C. told me that hauling logs alone, pays more now than sawmilling ever has. He also said, that everything costs much more now than it use to.

One of the other jobs that G.C. has had was working for TVA (Tennessee Valley Authority). TVA was set up under the New Deal, as a program to provide electricity to rural areas.³ Many were opposed to TVA and government intervention of any kind. The fact is that TVA produced many jobs for people from North Alabama, like G.C. He began working for TVA as a part-time employee in the 1960's. In 1970, he began working for them full time. He worked at the Widow's Creek Steam Plant in Stevenson,

²Conrad, Elmer. Timber, America's Magic Resource. Christopher Publishing House. New York, 1961.

³Rogers, William W.; Ward, Robert D.; Atkins, Leah Rawls; Flynt, Wayne. Alabama, The History of a Deep South State. University of Alabama Press. Tuscaloosa, 1994.

Alabama. He told me that, TVA always treated him well, but he hated working in the plants. He told me that he regretted not taking other jobs that they had offered him. He told me of many opportunities that he had to take easier jobs that would have been more to his liking, such as, working on road crews. He just said that for one reason or another he did not take them. He worked full time for TVA for fifteen years before retiring in 1985. During all of the time that G.C. worked for TVA he continued to farm and to sawmill as much as he could.

I asked him about the people that had worked for him throughout the years. I asked if he had always had good workers. he told me that he always had good help, and that he never really had any trouble with anyone. Throughout the years he had several employees that did not have homes, so he allowed them to come into his home and stay while they worked for him. His wife had a slight problem with this, but G.C.'s good nature prevailed and all through the years many people stayed with them. Most of these people had no place to go. They did not have homes of their own and times were very difficult for folks on Sand Mountain. These people just moved around from place to place and worked at whatever they could to provide for their families. It really impresses me that G.C., who had more than enough to get by on, would open his door to these people and give them an opportunity to work. These people worked very hard, and were very gracious to just be given a chance.

I asked G.C. if they had a certain method, or system that they used to start cutting down the trees. I asked him what happened after they had pulled the sawmill into the woods and got it all set up and ready for work. He said that they had no particular system that they used, "we just cut 'em down and went to work on 'em" he said. I also questioned him on another job that he had. Actually, it was more like a community service. He did not get paid, but I am sure he received many thanks. In winter many people in the

neighborhood did not have a way to haul things. The main source of heat, which everyone used, was coal. G.C. was equipped for hauling, so he would haul coal around to all of the people in the community that needed it. My father remembers when G.C. hauled coal to his family many years ago. Hauling coal, among other things, made G.C. a respected and highly regarded man in the community.

G.C. told me that even though times got hard and he could have looked into doing other things, he always enjoyed sawmilling more than anything else. He seemed to have many regrets about certain missed opportunities in the past. He once again recalled the offer of jobs from TVA, that were better than the one he had. He feels that they would have been easier and that he would have enjoyed them more. He also regrets not having made several real estate investments for which he had opportunities. He told of several different occasions in which he could have gotten rich by buying land. He stressed more than once that a man can get really rich if he knows how to buy and sell land. He spoke of one occasion in which he could have bought one thousand acres of land at a price of one dollar per acre. Only twelve years later, the land sold for over two hundred thousand dollars. G.C. looked somewhat disgusted when he told me that there was enough timber on the land to have tripled his money.

G.C. told me that he has never worked for any of the really huge sawmills that are around now. He did say that compared to many sawmillers he had a fairly large outfit, but it could in no way, compare to the really large ones. He told me that most of the lumber like that he used to cut is not around anymore. Nobody cuts lumber like that now, they say they don't have the time. Personally, I think they just don't take the time to do a good job, it is a lost art. G.C. told me that the type of plank he enjoyed cutting most was the railroad cross tie, they were easy to cut and he was just about the best at cutting them. He laughed, telling me that forty years ago he could haul them to Chattanooga and

get sixty to eighty cents apiece for them. Now they bring six to eight dollars each. He told me that today it costs too much for an individual to run a sawmill. A person with a sawmill the size of his could not possibly come out ahead. I guess that is why he only saws a few logs now and then, and does not rely on sawmilling as a source of income anymore. He seems very impressed with the modern machinery that the timber industry uses today, but I don't think he regrets having worked so hard for so many years. G.C.'s final story about sawmilling had to be the best. It was about a man from Trenton Georgia, that he met several years ago. About nine or ten years ago G.C. and Flora decided to build a new house. G.C. decided to fire up the old sawmill and cut the lumber for the house himself. When the house was finished G.C. realized that he had cut too much lumber, he had two loads left over. He decided to haul the wood to a lumber yard in Trenton Georgia. He had heard that he might be able to sell it there. When he arrived, the man he needed to talk to was not there, so he simply left the lumber there and told the people there that the man could get in touch with him if he wanted to buy it. Several days later G.C. got a letter in the mail from the man, it contained a check for the wood and a long letter. G.C. explained to me how the man had been extremely impressed with his work. He called G.C. at all hours for at least a year, wanting him to cut lumber for him. In the letter, the man also included that he thought that all old sawmillers like G.C. were already dead. G.C. repeated that part about four times, it obviously made him proud that someone recognized his good work even after all the years. He told me how he carried the letter around in his wallet for two or three years until it was completely worn out. He also told me about cutting timber for W.I. Word lumber company in Scottsboro. Both the president and the owner of the company said that he was the best sawmiller they had. He worked for them both before and after he was in the army. They liked his work so well that they pulled enough strings to delay his entry into the army for about two years so he could keep cutting timber for them.

Sawmillers obviously don't get any better than G.C. and neither do people. He has always been good to my family. He and I talked about how people do not put forth any effort into what they do any more, I suppose I am just as guilty as anyone else. G.C. is truly one of a kind. He epitomizes a lifetime of hard work and dedication to his trade and to his family. We ended the interview by getting off track a little bit, we sort of casually caught up on the local gossip about basketball. The whole interview really didn't seem like an interview at all, but more like just a casual conversation about days past. G.C. has definitely been a role model in my life, and in my father's as well. We both look up to him and admire him very much. The world definitely needs more people like G.C. Barrier. He is truly a classic.

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Chronology of events

- 1920s- KKK is revived in the south
- 1925- John T. Scopes is tried in Tennessee for teaching evolution.
- 1929- Herbert Hoover becomes president, on the eve of the great depression.
- 1932- Franklin D. Roosevelt is elected president.
- 1933- In his inaugural address Roosevelt presents the New Deal program.
- 1935- Louisiana Senator Huey P. Long is assassinated.
- 1936- Margaret Mitchell Publishes the novel Gone With the Wind.
- 1939- Clark Gable and Vivian Leigh star in the movie version of the novel
- 1941- The Japanese Bomb Pearl Harbor and the United States enters World War II.
- 1945- Germany surrenders
- 1945- Truman becomes President after Roosevelt dies.
- 1945- Truman orders the use of the atomic bomb on the Japanese.
- 1952- Eisenhower is elected president.
- 1954- Supreme court decision in Brown vs. Topeka Board of Ed. prohibits racial segregation in public schools.
- 1961- Kennedy is inaugurated as President.
- 1962- The University of Mississippi was forced, by the government to admit black student James Meredith.
- 1963- Despite efforts by Governor George Wallace, Two black students were allowed to register at the University of Alabama.
- 1963- Kennedy is assassinated and Lyndon Johnson takes over as president.
- 1963- Martin Luther King makes his, "I have a Dream", speech in Washington D.C.
- 1964- Lyndon Johnson is re-elected as president.
- 1964- Civil Rights act prevents discrimination in employment.
- 1965- Martin Luther King leads a civil rights march from Selma to Montgomery, Alabama.

- 1967- Thurgood Marshall becomes the first black member of the Supreme Court.
- 1968- Martin Luther King is assassinated.
- 1969- Nixon is inaugurated as President.
- 1972- Alabama Governor George Wallace is shot in an assassination attempt.
- 1972- Watergate affair begins.
- 1974- Nixon resigns form the presidency and Gerald Ford takes over.
- 1977- Jimmy Carter is inaugurated as president.
- 1980- Ronald Reagan is elected as president.
- 1982- George Wallace is elected once again as Governor of Alabama.

Interviewee Chronology Sheet

1920- G.C. Barrier was born in Harden County Tennessee.

1932- began sawmilling at age twelve.

1941- came to Alabama with one older sister and himself looking after a younger brother and sister.

1941- He was married and then entered the United States Army by order of the Government.

1943- He came back from the military and once again began sawmilling.

1970- He got a steady job with the Tennessee Valley Authority, at the Widow's Creek steam plant.

1982- He retired from TVA.

1996- He is classified as being retired, but he still farms and sawmills some.

LIST OF QUESTIONS

- When and where were you born?
- When did you come to Alabama?
- When did you go to World War II?
- How long were you in the Army?
- What did you do when you returned?
- When did you start sawmilling?
- When did you get your own sawmill?
- How were you treated by your employers?
- How many different places have you cut timber from?
- How did you know which trees to cut?
- Were prices always good?
- How long did you work for TVA?
- Did you enjoy working for TVA?
- How were farm prices?
- What did you raise when you first started farming?
- When did cotton begin to decline in this area?
- What did you raise after the decline of cotton?
- Have you always lived in this general area?
- Did you have good help when you ran your sawmill
- How did the sawmill work?
- How safe was sawmilling?
- Did you ever know or see anyone get injured by a sawmill?
- When did you get married?
- How many children did you have when you went into the Army?
- What other jobs did you have?

Did you ever work for any of the larger sawmills?

What types of boards did you cut?

Table of Contents

1. G.C.'s date of birth and a short discussion of his coming to Alabama.
2. A short discussion of his military service.
3. A beginning to our discussion of sawmilling, including stories, experiences etc.
4. Further discussion of sawmilling, including equipment, methods, locations etc.
5. Continuing discussion of sawmilling including safety, among other things.
6. Included in the discussion throughout the remainder of the tape are things related and unrelated to sawmilling, such as other jobs(TVA), family and several other stories.
7. Also included in the discussion was several aspects of farming.