

Oral Research Project

Robert C. Evans
Interviewed by
Robert W. Evans

Table of Contents

- 1 . Copy of taped interview.
- 2 . Copy of written project.
- 3 . Questions asked interviewee.
- 4 . National time line.
- 5 . Personal time line.
- 6 . Interviewee's questionnaire.
- 7 . Release form.

Change came slow to the people caught in the poverty of the Cumberland Mountain region in the span of forty ^{add} some old years from the nineteen thirties to the mid seventies. The passage of several of Franklin D. Roosevelt's New Deal Acts help to pull this area every so slowly forward. The Rural Electrification Act of 1935 and the New Deal conservation project known as the Tennessee Valley Authority were the two most important to this area.

Of course, the world outside of this area was going through drastic and ^{chaotic} caotic changes. World War Two of the nineteen forties with Japan and Germany had little social impact on the area. The men and women who left the area to participate in the war became more informed ^{about} ~~with~~ the outside world. Many of these people decided not to return to the area if at all possible. The more industrialized cities of the area such as Chattanooga attracted many of the poor mountain people to move in search of jobs created by World War Two, Korea, and Vietnam.

Many of the people of the mountain area were subsistence farmers. Some of the people worked in coal mines and made white liquor to support their families. People of this area had very ^{few opportunities} little oportunities unlike people moving into the urban areas around large cities. Most people who had moved to these urban communities still had to struggle to survive. The load of everyday survival had been eased for some of them compared to living in the mountain area. Everyday was a struggle in the mountains much as it had been from pioneer days. People still lived without electricity, running water or in most cases, interior walls. The houses of the area still resembled the traditional log cabin or pillared dogrun houses. Many of the people used old newspapers for wallpaper or to stuff into cracks to keep out the wind. Most houses had a fireplace or pot-bellied stoves for heat. Many houses

had no screens to keep out the flies. The flies could be herded out of the house with the waving of a rag only to return in a few minutes.

Medical and educational facilities were mostly none existent in the more mountainous areas. Most of the time the local church served as the school house. Many of the children didn't attend school after the teen years. They were usually required to work picking cotton or beans in the lower valleys. Some worked with their fathers in the coal mines hauling coal out by mule. Others worked on the homestead by doing the chores. Many of these chores were exhausting and had to be performed daily. All these elements ^{lead} lead to very tired uneducated children. The infant and child mortality rates were very high due to poor nutrition, disease and exhausting work. The children often had to survive on an onion and a piece of cornbread for the entire day. The average workday for a teenager started at dawn and ended after dark. Many worked all day long in the fields for pennies a day.

Very few doctors existed in the area due to the lack of money. Those who did work in the mountains or mainly in the lower valley towns weren't very well trained. Most of the medical problems were handled by a midwife or someone who knew a few things about first aid. Few people had any medical training at all which lead to a high death rate even for many minor injuries. Most births were handled at the home by a midwife.

Of course, the main industry in the area was the coal mine. Many attempts were made by union organizers to unionize the mines. Some successful attempts were made. Many ^{met} met with stiff resistance. A lot of injuries and a few fatalities occurred between "union men" and the mountain folks" of the area. Most of these incidents usually had ^{its} roots in the low education of the area. this allowed

led persuaded
for people to be lead or presuade by one or two influential men of the area. This person usually told everyone in the area how to vote. This leader usually regulated the jobs of the mines. Many of these men were the religious leaders and the more educated of the area. It was usually their decision *whether* weather to allow the unions to move in or put up a resistance. These men, despite their overbearing wills, had an enormous responsibility to the community in which they lived. Most of these local communities' entire economy depended on the operation of the mines. Most of the valley authorities resisted any pressure by unions or revenues *to* *?* inter in the local mountain politics or law enforcement. This left the unions to hire groups of men to help *to* *?* persuade the local mine operators to conform. More often than not these men carried guns and used violence as their means of persuasion. The revenues *to* were sent in many times to break up stills and stop the production of alcohol. Many of these men often came up missing or injured in their attempts to end what to some was their only means of finicial support.

Local judicial matters were handled by the local leaders or owners. Most people never questioned these decisions. No questions were usually asked if someone came up missing. Many people who got the oppurtunity to leave the mountain never returned except to visit a relative.

Living on the moutain was very rugged existance. The average life span was low. The local economy was poor to none existant. There little oppurtunities to recive a proper education or to succeed in anything. Most people tried to be content and exist the best way they could. Some were either brave enough or smart enough to leave in search of a better way of life. Those that left usually found something a little better.

The interviewee left at the age of seventeen with only fifty-

cents in his pocket. His avenue of escape was to join the United States Navy and serve his country in the Vietnam War. The hardships endured while living on the mountain may have better prepared him for this war than some others. The constant daily attempts just to survive another day and endure hardships was a good preparation for war. To him, the military provided many things that his parents trying to raise him on the mountain could not provide. The familiarity of using weapons on other people was also beneficial in preparation for his latter experiences.

Of course, Mr. Evans, with only a ninth grade education and his youth, upon entering the service was a great disadvantage in the fact that many military leaders used this to achieve their goals. The seclusion of mountain living from the outside world also provided an innocence to a young person's outlook.

Mr. Evans circled the globe three times during his stay in the military. He visited many exotic ports and countries. Upon returning home, he moved to Alabama. He only occasionally returns to the Cumberland Mountain area to visit. This has become less and less frequent over the years.

Of course, fond remembrances of having to break the ice in the water bucket beside your bed in the mornings to get a drink of water still ring clear in his mind. These memories of a home life seldom do much for the individual's concept of the outside world. Those who never ventured out side of the Cumberland Mountains believe that the whole world is the same as where they live. They also believe that everyone else believes and thinks as they do. Most of this can be attributed to the low education level of most of the inhabitants of the area. Those that have left the area for any reasonable length of time cannot understand the attitudes and thoughts of the people they grew up

awkward
sent

with. Most simply do not return to the area and sever their contact with others of the area.

Although, the area was slow to move forward with the rest of nation, many in the area today have all the modern conveniences that the rest of the nation enjoy. Most people in the area today have a car, access to medical facilities, and medium grade of education. The Rural electrification Act of 1935 and the Tennessee Valley Authority created Franklin D. Roosevelt's New Deal are to be credited. The major wars of the twentieth century helped to stimulate the economies of the lower valley towns. This may have indirectly helped the area by allowing some of the people to move to the lower valley towns and earn enough money to help their families still living on the mountains. Few of these people ever returned themselves which is evident by the decrease in population of the area.

Of course, the day of the subsistence farmer is over. Most people of the area today make their living in the lower valley towns and commute back and forth. Most still live on the land their family prior to the Civil War. The local mines once so vital to the local economy of the area are no longer in use today. Most of these have been filled in or caved in. The houses of the area have improved with the addition of a little local wealth. Some of the older generation still live in the dogrun houses of their fathers. Most of these people are beginning to die and the remaining children are building new homes with their new jobs. The life of the Cumberland Mountain person has become much easier in the early seventies.

Good information
need to use
the information
from your interview
more. Use some quotes
from the book.
Have the word proof-read
for spelling errors.
JS

Gift and Release Agreement

We Robert C. EVANS and Robert W. EVANS
Interviewee (print) Interviewer (print)

do hereby give and grant to Dr. Suzanne Marshall, Assistant Professor of History, Jacksonville State University, all literary and property rights, title, and interest which we may possess to the audio or video recording(s) and transcript(s) of the interview(s) conducted at

128 West 49th Street, Anniston, Al. 36206

on the date(s) of 08/09/94 / 08/01/94

for the oral history collection being compiled by Dr. Marshall.

Robert C. Evans
Interviewee's signature

Address 128 West 49th Street
Anniston, Al 36206
Phone (205) 238-1458

Date 07/01/94

Robert W. Evans
Interviewer's signature

Address 4815 Angel Blvd.
Anniston, Al. 36206
Phone (205) 236-1453

Date 08/09/94

INTERVIEWEE BACKGROUND INFORMATION

Name: Robert C. Evans M/F Male
Address: 128 West 49th St.
Phone number(s): (605) 238-1458
Approximate age or date of birth: 10-26-44
Mother's Name: ESSIE MAE EVANS
Father's Name: SAM JOHN EVANS
Places lived and when: TEXAS, ARKANSAS, TENNESSEE,
Alabama, California, South Carolina 1940's-1990's
Education: 9th grade
Religion: none professed except a believe in God
Business, political and social memberships (past and present) none

Present occupation: ADD Anniston Army Depot
Former occupations: many; major - mechanic (tank)
Special Skills: N/A
Major Accomplishments: survived

National Events in which interviewee has participated: VIETNAM WAR

Local Events in which interviewee has participated: Union disputes
over controlling coal mines in southern Tennessee
National born U.S. citizen? Yes/No
Naturalized Citizen: Yes/No Date: N/A
Country from which he/she emigrated: N/A
Documents, photographs, and artifacts which are in the possession of the interviewee:
mostly personal family photographs
Individuals recommended by the interviewee who might be candidates for an oral history interview: N/A
Additional information: N/A

Table of Contents for Tape

1. Question about home life
in the Cumberland Mountains.
2. Detailed answer.

1. Mr. Evans tell me about your childhood growing up in the Cumberland mountains?
2. Can you tell me when you entered the United States Navy?
3. Mr. Evans can you tell me when you first entered the Vietnam War?
4. What were your feelings about the war then and now?
5. How did you feel about the JFK administration?
6. How did you feel about the Johnson administration?
7. How did you feel about the Nixon administration?
8. How did you feel about the withdrawal from Vietnam?
9. How do you feel about the treatment of the U. S. Armed Forces that returned from the War?
10. How do you feel about the people of Vietnam?

11. How do you feel about your own families' reaction upon your return?
12. How do you feel about the sexual revolution of the 60's compared to the military code of conduct?
13. How do you feel about your country today?
14. What are your feelings about country today?
15. How do you feel about the poverty of the region that you grew up in?

National Time Line 1950 to 1970's

- 1950 Korean War begins
- 1952 Eisenhower elected president
- 1953 Rosenbergs executed and Korean War ends
- 1954 Brown vs. Board of Education
- 1956 Eisenhower reelected
- 1957 Civil Rights Act
- 1960 Kennedy, John F. elected president
- 1961 growing communist threat
- 1962 Cuban missile crisis
- 1963 Kennedy assassinated
- 1964 Johnson reelected president
- 1965 Vietnam War growing
- 1967 Sexual revolution and demonstrations
- 1968 Nixon's election to presidency
- 1969 Nuclear limits talks with Russia
- 1970 U. S. Forces inter into Cambodia

Interviewee's Personal Time Line

1950 6 years old injured on plow

1959 Drops out of school in the 9th grade

1961 Enters United States Navy

1961 Leaves for Vietnam

1963 Returns home for short time and returns to war same year.

1965 Enters for another tour.

1969 Exits military service.

1970 Moves back to Alabama.