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Thomas Boles
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THOMAS BOLES

REEL LXXXI

[START OF INTERVIEW]

Herb Evison: This is Herbert Evison. Tonight, I am in Carlsbad, New Mexico, – tonight being January 7, 1963 – and I am in the living room of Colonel Tom Boles. Colonel Boles, as all old-timers in the National Park Service know, is one of the old-timers of the National Park Service, his employment in the Service dating back to – what was it you said, 1922?

Tom Boles: February 1922.

Herb Evison: February 1922. And, Tom, you retired from the Park Service when?

Tom Boles: January 31, 1951; thirty years.

Herb Evison: And I think you told me a few minutes ago that you had arrived at the age of 82. I think that indicates that you stayed with the Service until the statutory age of retirement.

Tom Boles: That's right.

Herb Evison: Now, you started in 1922. I would like to know how come and where?

Tom Boles: Well, it's a long story. I'm an engineer by training. After I finished my high school in Portland, Oregon, I attended the Missouri School of Mines and took civil engineering and worked on railroad construction through Oklahoma for many years. And then there was an opening in the national park in Hot Springs, Arkansas. The presidential election came in 1921 and the appointment of superintendent of Hot Springs National Park was always controlled by the recommendation of the Republican Central Committee. I secured that recommendation over considerable opposition, and in getting in touch with Washington the national committeeman said he had talked with Secretary Fall and that they felt it was best to have a doctor at Hot Springs, Arkansas, but that they were just establishing a new national park in Hawaii where my training as a civil engineer would fit me much better, and would I be interested in that; and I accepted it.

Herb Evison: Now, that made you the first superintendent of Hawaii National Park.

Tom Boles: Yes, sir.

Herb Evison: Of course, the interesting thing nowadays in thinking about that is the route by which one became a park superintendent. You were a brand-new employee, you started as a superintendent, and you were not picked from any Civil Service list.

Tom Boles: Yes. I had been in the Civil Service as a civil engineer.

Herb Evison: Yes, but there was no Civil Service list for superintendents or any Civil Service requirement.

Tom Boles: I had a rating of senior engineer on the Civil Service list.

Herb Evison: Of course, one of the interesting things is that practically all of those early superintendents came into the Service as superintendents; started at the top, in other words.

Tom Boles: But they had background that justified it.

Herb Evison: Oh, yes.

Herb Evison: Now, from that time on, you went to Hawaii in 1922, and what were your other jobs and when, with the National Park Service?

Tom Boles: Well, after five years as superintendent of Hawaii National Park my wife wanted to get back to the mainland and so they transferred me back to California where I was stationed for a while in the Branch of Designs office in Los Angeles. And then Mr. Albright came by there one time and I visited, and he was just getting ready to leave for Tucson and I said, "I want to talk with you, and I'll just get on the train and ride an hour." Then he told me that they had just opened up the park at Carlsbad, New Mexico, and were building a road up to it and building a parking surface, and they had run into a snag and run out of money, and he would like me to go over there and straighten it out.

Tom Boles: And so, I came to Carlsbad and completed the road within the estimate, and then they asked me if I would like to stay there as superintendent and I said, "Yes." I think this is one of the wonders of the world and I – and they appointed me custodian, which was later changed to superintendent.

Herb Evison: And of course, it was then a National Monument.

Tom Boles: That's right. I was superintendent even when it was a National Monument; they gave it the title.

Herb Evison: But it was, when you came it was a National Monument for a while.

Tom Boles: That's right.

Herb Evison: And you were – then that would have been in 1927, wouldn't it?

Tom Boles: When I came there, yes. And it was changed to a national park about '30.

Herb Evison: And you remained here as superintendent until when?

Tom Boles: Until June 1946, practically twenty years.

Herb Evison: A long period of service as a superintendent of one area.

Tom Boles: They may have forgotten me.

Herb Evison: Possibly, but not likely.

Tom Boles: Well, it may have been that a lot of folks in the Service didn't think much of just being in charge of a hole in the ground full of bats, and therefore they'd leave me alone.

Herb Evison: Well, anyway, at the end of that period you were transferred.

Tom Boles: They transferred me to Hot Springs, Arkansas.

Herb Evison: The place where you had first applied for a job.

Tom Boles: Yes, yes, although I was endorsed for it thirty years – well, in '21 I was endorsed for it, and I went there in '46, so that shows you. Of course, it changed a whole lot in that time, but I was there five years and enjoyed it. It was right close; I was born only fifty miles from Hot Springs in Yell County. And I think nearly all the superintendents they had had before – I was number nineteen superintendent at Hot Springs, whereas I was number one at Carlsbad Cavern and number one in Hawaii; but I was number nineteen in Hot Springs, Arkansas, and it was a well-going machine. In fact, the hot springs of Arkansas as a reservation antedates Yellowstone by thirty years.

Herb Evison: You made a remark to me over the telephone yesterday, or rather, you quoted a remark you said you made quite frequently about three extraordinary areas that you had been in charge of, and the way you describe them. Let's get that on tape. You had been superintendent of an area—

Tom Boles: Yes, I know exactly what you mean. I have been introduced in several places to speak many times and someone would ask, "What are your special qualifications for making this talk?" "Well," I says, "I am one man that for five years had charge of three live volcanoes; for twenty years I had charge of five million bats; and for five years I had supervision over five hundred bathtubs. Now, if any of you boys can match that, why, you can have the job."

Herb Evison: Well, Tom, we have gotten that quick summary of your years with the Park Service. I think it might be of some interest, since you have now been retired for more than eleven years, to get on the record a little something about what you've been doing since, because if I remember rightly you became a sort of glad-hander for Horace Albright's company for a while, didn't you?

Tom Boles: Horace Albright, who was for twelve years superintendent of Yellowstone National Park and then for many years director of the National Park System, he became president in charge of the big potash mine here near Carlsbad.

Tom Boles: It's an outfit that came from Death Valley here, and he was president of that, and he told me whenever I retired from the National Park Service, he would have room for me here. At that time they started their big office building and I supervised the construction of that, then was on their public relations, so whenever they had official visitors, customers, visitors from foreign lands, I was to take them through the refinery, take them through the mine, and always through the Carlsbad Caverns. In that way I've met people from all over the world and get Christmas cards from them. Two years ago, I think that was about the tops of my Christmas cards: I got three Christmas cards from Jerusalem, one from Little America at the South Pole, from people I had taken through the Carlsbad Caverns. So that shows me I got to meet people from everywhere; I just sit in one place and they came to me.

Herb Evison: Or if they weren't from everywhere, they got everywhere eventually.

Herb Evison: Well, Tom, I wrote you a week or ten days ago saying that I wanted to get some of your experiences on tape, and when I did write you about that I asked you to make some notes so that when we got together this would be the really good kind of tape I was hoping for. And I notice that you have in front of you a pretty copious supply of – I don't think they're very informative notes but they're reminders to you, aren't they?

Tom Boles: Prompters.

Herb Evison: Prompters, yes. Well, now, I would like to cover this in a sort of orderly fashion but before I go on to your notes I want to ask you one question that we were discussing a little bit ago: I noticed a letter from you in the records – it must have been dated around 1923 or '4, in connection with your attendance at a superintendents' conference at Yellowstone. It was a letter written to Stephen T. Mather in which you assured him that you were going to be present but also told him that because of certain conditions over on the Islands you were leaving Mrs. Boles in charge, which struck me then and still strikes me as a very extraordinary kind of arrangement, for the superintendent to beat it to a conference and leave his wife in charge of the place. What's the background of that?

Tom Boles: Well, she had no official capacity, but then when the Park Service was established in the Hawaiian Islands there had been other government agencies in that area, scientific observers, that were glad to have the Park Service take over the expense of the place but they didn't – they resented anybody having the administration. And some of them I thought would not hesitate at anything to make a person dissatisfied so they'd move away. Mrs. Boles knew just as well as I who they were, and had she made the trip to Yellowstone with me, why, I'm afraid they would have had us

pretty well dug out by the time we got back. But she knew to watch and knew to listen.

Tom Boles: Now, the employees we had over there in the Park Service were loyal. But we got back, and the Park Service finally did get popular. Of course, the volcano was the big show up there, and even before we got there, they had an observatory checking the rise and fall and temperatures and all that. And they did not report to the Park Service, but when the visitors would come up and ask who the man was in charge of the area they would send them to the superintendent of the park and not to this fellow, and his friends couldn't figure that out, because he was there first. But leaving her in charge, she didn't have any official capacity, but she was a listening post for me, which was all right, it was all right.

Herb Evison: Well, now, I am sure that among your notes you have some material dealing with Hawaii, and since that was your first assignment how about you giving your Hawaii material first?

Tom Boles: Well, I landed over there, first I landed in Honolulu and attended a meeting there of the heads, I believe it was, and they gave me nice greetings, then I went over to the Big Island, which is 200 miles south. Had a car there; took me back from the coast thirty miles up to where the park is.

Tom Boles: Now, the park then was in three pieces – one on the other island, and one around Kilauea Volcano where the Volcano House was, and another one up on top of the mountain thirty miles away which is an extinct – well, an active crater but it was disconnected at that time; later on it was connected up.

Herb Evison: You mean – that's Mauna Loa?

Tom Boles: Yes. Well, I went there, and the hotel there which has been there off and on for many years – you can see the crater across there; then we drove down and the lava was about 100 feet from the top, boiling and simmering, but in the daytime it's not very impressive in the daytime. But we went down there again in the night and of course it was incandescent and very spectacular; it formed clouds over it and would light them up, and it was very impressive to me or to anybody else. Of course, all the home folks on the island had visited now and then, but our big bunches there from around-the-world steamships that would stop at Hilo and then they would all come up and spend the day and night to see the volcano.

Tom Boles: And it was more than a volcano. The drive down there was about seven miles through a jungle of ferns, where the ferns were so big, they'd touch across the top of the road.

Tom Boles: I had very little funds to start, to do any work down there, so what I used my first spare funds with was to sort of straighten out some of the curves, the sharpest curves, on that road down into the crater. And that's about the first thing I did, fix the road where you can see around the corners.

Herb Evison: Well, now, tell me this: When you went over there as superintendent, was anybody else appointed, anybody else employed at that time?

Tom Boles: Yes, there was an old fellow, he said he was a Hawaiian, but I think he was a Cherokee Indian. His name was Alec; he was a guide. He had appointment as chief ranger. He had no more qualities as chief ranger than – well, I can't imagine what it would be. He was a good guide, but he was always soliciting tips and all that kind of stuff; and he wouldn't dress in a uniform – he wanted to dress slouchy and get sympathy and all that; but he was a good guide and entertained you. He would talk Hawaiian or English or whatever you wanted to talk. But that was the only one. Then I picked up a driver and one or two trail workers.

Tom Boles: But the administration of it had just been held as a sideline by a Geological Survey man who was in Honolulu; and of course, I took over full charge when I got there; he had no appointment. Later he was surf riding in Waikiki and was killed when a surfboard hit him.

Tom Boles: But I had a very small force; had a very small appropriation, only $10,000 a year. But the road had already been built up there and I polished it up and folks would come up to see it. It was really quite a sight; although it was 4,000 feet above sea level the slope was so gradual you never felt that you were climbing a hill; then you'd look down the top of it there, and it would raise and lower, day and night; quite a show.

Tom Boles: Then after I'd been there about two years, I believe it was – a year-and-a-half – it was within forty feet of the top; it was so hot that when you'd take visitors over there you'd have to get pie plates from the hotel, paper pie plates, and put air holes in them and hold them in front of your face so you could look down at the fire. And they would stand there just fascinated with it. All the taxi drivers were musicians; they would play their ukes and sing Hawaiian songs, oh, a hundred feet back in there; it was very beautiful. And to look at that row of people with all their faces white, ghastly looking, looked like they were all skulls.

Tom Boles: Well, that raised and lowered for months, and then one Sunday morning, why, there was only one man over there early one Sunday and he came rushing back. He said he was sitting there – it had been rumbling for two or three days – and he said he was sitting there and it commenced to rise awful fast and right in the middle he said there was a bubble; the middle of it boiled up just like a bubble, and although the rim was about thirty feet

down, why, it was higher than the rim. And he looked fascinated and he thought, "Well, when that bursts it's going to spray me," so he commenced to run.

Tom Boles: Well, it burst, and when it did burst it threw lava up in the air and then dropped down and commenced to whirl, in a vortex. Suddenly it cut loose down below, pulled the plug. Anyhow it started a whirlpool and that lava, instead of being forty feet below the surface, in about three days it was 1700 feet down and all the liquid lava was gone. It had gone out through a tunnel somewhere out toward the ocean.

Tom Boles: Well, the assistant scientist and I were there, and there was a line of craters where the lava had gone to the ocean years before, and these craters were where it had caved in. So, he had what was called geo-phones, like a stethoscope only you put it on the ground and you can hear what's crunching down below maybe a thousand feet deep; and we followed that lava pushing through the ground clear to the ocean, and it never did come up except one or two places. But we tracked it clear down there to the ocean.

Tom Boles: Well, the fire, the liquid rock, was all gone from the crater. It was a disappointment. It was hot. Now and then at night we would hear it rumble and it would be the walls falling in, cooling, and when they'd fall in, they'd uncover the red-hot background and it would look just like it was running again. We'd run over there and that's all it would be. We were a great many months doing that; the walls would fall in and plug up that vent which connected out of the ocean.

Tom Boles: Then we had a series of earthquakes, and one of those earthquakes must have cracked that tube and let the sea water down in this tunnel that led to the volcano, and it generated steam, but it couldn't blow it out because this talus had packed down in. But it eventually developed a pressure of maybe 4- or 5,000 pounds per square inch and blew that plug out, threw rocks up seven and eight thousand feet high. We heard it at night, about nine o'clock at night it commenced to rumble and rumble over there. We had seen the glare before, you know, but this time the stuff was going up like a skyrocket; a big red-hot rock would go up and come down and meet another one and burst.

Tom Boles: Well, the wind was at our backs, where the settlement was, and I didn't think there was any danger except in case the ash would come over to us and might smother us. So finally, the wind changed, so we just bundled up, my wife and baby and I, packed in our car and headed down for the coast. And we could still hear it roar. But after we got a little ways out, why, the roar stopped and we came back and stayed all night; the thing

had quit. And I went down next morning and all around the crater for hundreds of yards was fresh rock that had been blown out by the volcano.

Tom Boles: Well, it was still generating steam down there, and these rocks that would fall back in were packed down in, would generate pressure – just it took them about six hours to generate pressure and it would blow out again; so almost on a clock schedule every six hours it would blow these steam explosions. And one time there was a big ship, the Empress of India, I believe, came there with, oh, four or five hundred visitors, and they wanted to see it blow up. Well, I knew as long as the wind was at the back it was all right, so I parked them all up on a cliff about a half a mile away and, oh, three or four hundred feet high, where if it did explode, the wind was right. And they sat there and watched and wanted to know when it was going to blow up. I said, "Well, according to schedule it will blow up in about thirty minutes." There was a Japanese photographer there; he said, "Can I take a photograph of it?" I said yes. He had a banquet photograph that takes pictures fifteen inches wide and eight inches high. I said, "Turn it endwise, because that thing shoots up," and he turned it endwise.

Tom Boles: Well, it wasn't over a few minutes till that thing fired off, and none of the ashes and stuff fell over by us, but the rumble, and every time it would blow up this ashes and stuff in the air, it would form a thunder cloud, lightning, up and down, up and down, thunder and lightning, and these cliffs would echo it back. And we had one very famous general in the crowd; he said that it exceeded any bombardment he ever heard in France at all.

Tom Boles: Well, that was about ten o'clock in the morning. They were to eat lunch at the hotel, come back at twelve o'clock after they had seen the eruption, back to the hotel. But when that thing got to going full speed throwing rocks, rumbling, and thundering and lightning, they headed for the ship. They had set table for three hundred people but only thirty stayed for the meal; the rest of them went to the boat and wanted to go home, said they had seen all the volcano they wanted.

Tom Boles: Well, I put the danger line around the thing so nobody could go in there. One man sneaked in; he said he could carry a paper parasol and keep off everything that would come out there. Well, he carried his paper parasol, but a rock hit him in the leg and cut his leg off and he died.

Tom Boles: But after it got quiet, they didn't have newsreels then, then had what they called Pathe News. The fellow came over there and he wanted to go in and take a picture of what was down in the bottom there, and I says, "All right, I'll go in with you. I'll know where to go." So, we went down over the

cliff, kept the wind at our back, and went over the edge of the volcano, and it was just sputtering up a little ashes and stuff down at the bottom, no fire. "Well," he says, "I'll put my telescope lens on here and telephoto and photograph it and it will look big on the screen; it will really look like something." He says, "All these rocks around here have blown up?" I says "Yes. This won't be faking. You walk over to the edge of that thing and make out like you're looking in, and then I'll have one of these boys throw one of these rocks from over behind that will land on the rim right by you, and you look like you're scared and all that, and that'll make a good movie."

Tom Boles: So, we rehearsed it one time and then we got to the real thing: Here come a rock about thirty feet away as big as a bushel basket. I says, "Who threw that?" And he says, "Look up in the sky; it's just full of them." There was so much roar, a little bit extra roar didn't make any difference. So, everybody picked up and ran; they picked up the camera and ran down to where the car was, three thousand feet; and I ran; it was commencing beyond me; they had me bracketed and I thought, "Well, they're going to hit me sooner or later; I'll just see if I can't jump across it." There was an earthquake crack just about eighteen inches wide and maybe four or five feet deep. I dropped in that. I thought if they got me at all they'd have to give me a direct hit.

Tom Boles: Then after I had been there about seven or eight minutes I figure, "Well, that thing is going to bury me with ashes; I just hope my folks don't bother to dig me out because I'm buried here." Well, in about eight or ten minutes it quit, ran out of steam. And when I fell it skinned both knees and both hands. I wasn't afraid of getting killed, but I was afraid of being blinded, and so I kept my hands over my eyes, but there was blood. Then when these other folks came back and it was all over, I crawled out of my crack in the ground there, wiped my face with my hands, blood all over my forehead; and one of these Hawaiian boys, he turned and ran back to where the rest of them were and said, "I don't have a thing to do with that man Boles. I saw him crawl out of a hole, pick up his head and set it on top of his shoulders; and I don't want to have anything to do with him." And he didn't.

Tom Boles: But we finally got all fixed out and went over to the Army camp there and they spent quite a little while picking splinters out of my arms. I didn't have any head wounds at all, but they picked plenty of splinters – rock splinters – out of my knees and out of my hands; one or two in there yet.

Tom Boles: But that's as close as anybody can get to the volcano, to get to the top of it and be looking down in and have it blow up in their face. In my five years

in Hawaii that was just about as exciting a moment as you could get anywhere.

Herb Evison: I can believe that.

Tom Boles: And I just know how those people in that big ship felt even though they were a half a mile away when that thing commenced to put rocks up in the air big as automobiles.

Tom Boles: But then for years it didn't have much action, but since I left there it has put on some terrific shows.

Tom Boles: Before I left, though, the big mountain Mauna Loa erupted at the top. We felt the earthquakes, and in daylight I could see the jet of steam up at the top. And usually Mauna Loa, which is three miles high, will erupt for a while and then it will develop hydrostatic pressure and break out the sides somewhere, and we would just wait and see where it breaks out. It broke out about 7,000-foot elevation, and that's where there's some timber and it commenced to burn and make big smoke; so I knew by the contour about where it was going to hit the ocean; there was a big stream of lava coming down. It doesn't run fast. So, the captain of the military camp and I, we had a driver, carried a driver, and we went around on that island and went back and walked alongside of it as this stream of lava was creeping down the mountain. It wouldn't run but about, oh, a mile-and-a-half an hour. You could keep out of the way of it, and as long as you kept the wind back of you it was all right. In fact, we stayed there one night, and the ashes from the burned leaves would get around us but we knew the fire wouldn't get in our way.

Tom Boles: But one of the stories that I tell there, as we came to the road around there, there was a little old country church, and the lava, when it got to that church, commenced to push the church before it destroyed it, rang the church bell just as if somebody was in there. And I saw that picture in a Believe-It-Or-Not cartoon years later, of the church that rang its own funeral bell. I saw it; I heard it.

Tom Boles: Then it went on down to the little village named Hupaloa, about twenty houses and a post office, dock, depot, and we stayed there all night. I stayed there in a little old store, Chinese store; he had carried all his stuff away. It looked like this lava was going to hit that because the contour was set for that.

Herb Evison: Because the contour was what?

Tom Boles: Was such that the lava would go around it. But there was quite a little village there, so we watched it; I made sketches of it, took pictures. And there was an old Hawaiian priest there. Of course, Hawaii is a Christian

place, but they got to hold onto that old priest stuff that they still believe in too. I have seen them by the hundreds pitch offerings to the volcano at the top, money and berries.

Tom Boles: Well, this old priest he got him some switches and put little red rags on the end of the switch and made a circle above the town, a semicircle. He says, "Goddess of the Volcano will not cross that line. Stay in your town. You are all right. That's going to save you." And believe it or not, the lava came within about a thousand feet of those switches and divided, went on one side and, and one on the other.

Herb Evison: In spite of the contours?

Tom Boles: Yes. Lava will go uphill; it will push itself up quickly. And well, he was pretty well pleased. And then the fellow that owned the store, he said, "That fellow don't know what he's talking about; this town is going. You'd just as well get your stuff." So, everybody commenced to load up his stuff, and they took the windows and doors off the houses. The old priest he says, "Now you've broken the spell. I can't help you anymore. Your village is going to be destroyed." And in thirty minutes that thing flowed around and destroyed that town. The harbor, which had been fifteen feet deep, was a peninsula of clinkers, the water was boiling, fish that had been in the ocean would hit the hot water and try to swim through it and it would kill them. And the next day, why, the sharks were in there just by the scores to pick up the dead fish off the cool water. But I saw that village destroyed by lava from a vent which was mile after mile away.

Tom Boles: So, I say I have seen some pretty hot stuff over there in the island of Hawaii. All national park superintendents have big events in their assignment of duty, but those were hard to match.

Tom Boles: Later on, why, when the volcanic activity ceased, why, you would just take the folks and show them the fern jungle and show them what used to be two or three years ago. There was one earthquake track not far from my office, the superintendent's office, and I logged it over, trapped the steam and piped the steam under my office floor in big tin boxes and up the chimney; and I could turn that valve on out there in the earthquake crack and it would warm my floors and heat my office, and the steam would go up the chimney. And I had a red light just about a foot down below the chimney; turn that on at night and the steam would look red. And every time I would do it somebody would come up from the hotel and tell me my flue was burned out. And I'll tell you a very famous author Ibáñez, the leading author of Spain—

Herb Evison: Who?

Tom Boles: Vicente Ibáñez, wrote the Four Horsemen. He and his wife were there, and he was very fascinated with the way I could turn the steam on and off and he insisted on working that valve himself four or five times. He gives it a page-and-a-half in his book about his trip around the world, how we heated our office with a jet of steam from the side of a volcano.

Tom Boles: But as I say, my wife was dissatisfied over there; rain all the time; the rainfall in one year there was 142 inches. That means if you've got a tank twelve feet deep it's just like it was being filled. And my little girl was getting so she was school age, and we had been trying to teach her there at home with the Calvert System, so we moved back to the United States and, as I say, was stationed there at Los Angeles a while, then over to Carlsbad, and that's when I started my work here in Carlsbad, in 1927. But the five years in Hawaii were eventful. And they've had activity since then; the big crater that blew up two years ago, Kilauea Iki, that was 754 feet deep, was extinct. I've been down in that several times, but it's a good place to keep out of now, because it has built up.

Tom Boles: That covers the five years in Hawaii pretty good. As I say, I've been through – the seismograph when I was over there registered 7200 earthquakes. In five years, I've seen 42 volcanic eruptions and one village destroyed, so that's my share of volcanic activity.

[END OF SIDE 1]

[START OF SIDE 2]

Herb Evison: Tom, you were superintendent of Carlsbad Caverns National Monument and National Park for a long, long while, and I know that one of the things that you loved to do to the day of your retirement, and still do, is to go through the caverns with the parties of visitors, and I think you still get a good deal of enjoyment out of sort of winding up the program in the cave with a little speech. And if I'm not mistaken you have delivered that speech, oh, as often as three or four times a day on some occasions, and probably to a total of five thousand times. Well, I think that it's about time that that got on tape, so how about giving it to me on tape?

Tom Boles: Well, it has been years since I gave that, but I can visualize it and I believe I can do pretty good.

Herb Evison: Now, what you're referring to is the ceremony which we held every day for every party at the base of the Rock of Ages in the Big Room. Bear in mind, we enter the cave at the natural entrance, take about an hour-and-a-half to go to the lunch rooms and about thirty minutes for lunch; then we start around the Big Room, which is a mile and a quarter to go around it; then when you're almost finished with that big room – now on that Big

Room trip you pass in the middle of the best stuff of this cavern or any other cavern; there are some of those things that are just unmatched any place – and when they reach the Rock of Ages, we had some crude seats there, why, a lot of them were ready to sit down and rest anyhow. And the Rock of Ages, which was named many years before, was – they used to meet about five hundred feet in there and turn out the lights just for a few moments' darkness, then pump them up again; they're electric lights – I mean they're gasoline lights.

Tom Boles: So, when we got the electric lights where we could handle them through rheostat and switches, why, we moved it and put the song in.

Tom Boles: The Rock of Ages itself is a stalagmite probably forty or fifty feet high. Ages differ, but it is regarded as one of the oldest ones there.

Tom Boles: We seat the crowd there, and I would stand up at the base of the Rock of Ages. And I'll try to repeat this. They're all looking forward to it. I'll say:

Tom Boles: "We're now almost at the end of our trip. We have finished our tour of the Big Room, the biggest room in the world. And on this Big Room you have seen things that are not matched anywhere else in the world. You have passed the Giant Dome thirty minutes ago – sixty-two feet high, sixteen feet in diameter – and some geologists have estimated the age of that one formation at least sixty million years old. Sixty million is a long time. Remember the Pyramids of Egypt, the oldest structures built by man, six thousand years old; yet the Giant Dome of Carlsbad Caverns is ten thousand times older than the oldest pyramid of Egypt.

Tom Boles: "Remember the Big Trees of California – three thousand years old. Yet when the biggest tree of California was a mere seedling, the Giant Dome of Carlsbad Caverns lacked but thirty inches of being as high as it is today.

Tom Boles: "And that is only one of the hundreds of wonders and beauties by which we pass."

Tom Boles: "We are now seated at the base of the Rock of Ages. This was called the Rock of Ages because many years ago some visiting geologists rested here. They computed its age right at fifty million years, and they gave it the name Rock of Ages, which I think is very appropriate.

Tom Boles: "At this time we'll probably show you a little bit about our lights. The lighting of the Big Room is a masterpiece of electric illumination. At no time during your trip around the Big Room have you seen a switch, a cable, or floodlights. All have been artfully concealed behind the rocks, sending their beams up on the formations and on the ceiling. They in return reflected the light back to the trail. So, at no time during our trip are the wonders of nature marred by the works of man. We can light all these

lights at once; we have enough power; but we would rather just concentrate the lights on an area near which you are walking, so your attention may not be detracted about something that may be a quarter of a mile or a half of a mile in the distance."

Tom Boles: "But in a few minutes I'm going to demonstrate these lights, and for a period of thirty seconds I'm going to turn them all out, and for the first time in your life you'll be in absolute darkness, 750 feet of rock above your head, not a ray of light can pass through. Then at the end of thirty minutes (seconds) the lights will return."

Tom Boles: "But before I turn the lights, I want to call your attention to this formation at my left. This huge formation, as I say, has been estimated to be fifty million years old and it was named the Rock of Ages. I want you to remember that formation, because to many that is the outstanding formation: this moment is the high spot of your trip to the caverns today. Now for thirty seconds – silence and darkness."

Tom Boles: The lights go out, then at the end of thirty seconds 600 feet away eight rangers begin singing the well-known hymn Rock of Ages, and as they sing it the lights come on, by rheostat, like a distant sunrise. And by the time they reach the end of the song the entire crowd and the Rock of Ages is bathed in a glow of light; is silence; is impressed. It's a tremendous experience for us all.

Tom Boles: Then to sort of break the strain that most people are in, we call the roll of the States, which had been taken from the top and brought down to me. So, I called, "You might be interested to know who's here with you today. We've got a thousand people in this one group. We have forty States represented in this one group. Sometimes we have forty-eight, but today we have forty. I'll name them all; start off: Arkansas 24, Alabama 32, Alaska 7, and go on down, and when I come to Texas, I skip that and go on down and finish the alphabet. Then I say, "The last one is Texas. All this thousand in here from everywhere – 500 come from the State of Texas." Then that breaks any strain that the Rock of Ages had. They really figured that they had been noticed and that they're really something. And I thank them. I thank them for all States if we had every State there. "However," I say, "Texas will always be our best customer, because," I said, "there was one year when we had 200,000 people through the caves, and 100,000 came from the State of Texas. That's a magnificent showing but it's not good enough. Going at that rate, it's going to take us 100 years to show the caves to the State of Texas alone, which is too long to wait. And once you return to your homes, send your friends here in larger numbers. Tell them that with 1,000 people we didn't fill up one corner of

one room. With our present trails and our present lights, we can handle thousands as easily as we handle hundreds."

Tom Boles: "This ends our trip today. From here we pass through the Polar Regions, in a few minutes reach the lunchroom again, elevators; at that time, you can walk out."

Tom Boles: But that I thought – I handled that ceremony about five thousand times. I used to make notes at the end of each day of how many were in my visual audience. And when the thing was abolished in 1946 – maybe '45 – my total was 2,188,000 visual audience. Now of course when you talk on radio you may talk to more than that, but when you talk on radio you don't know whether you talk to a million people or you're just talking to the mechanics in the next room. But I had that many right there.

Tom Boles: But the crowds got larger and I guess they didn't care so much for the dramatization. Some people thought it was inappropriate to have what had a tendency to be a religious thing, although it has been very wonderful.

Tom Boles: I think one of the most impressive moments I ever had – and I've had lots of them – was one time at the Rock of Ages when we had the Shriners from Los Angeles and other places. It was a trainload came to El Paso from Los Angeles, nine hundred Shriners; these fellows that make lots of noise and have the red caps. And I invited the other Shriners from west Texas, New Mexico, Colorado, so we had fourteen hundred of them that day.

Tom Boles: I stayed at the entrance, with my red cap on, and they shook hands as they went by. And after fourteen hundred of them shook hands I had to put my hand in a bucket of water to get freedom back into it. Anyhow, they brought with them their chanters, which is a trained choir of twenty-four voices from Los Angeles, and they sang after our Rock of Ages ceremony, in the dim light they sang the Lord's Prayer, and it was directed by Ray Milette, the man who wrote the music to the Lord's Prayer. That was the high spot, the most impressive moment I have had, and I've had lots of' them.

Tom Boles: And it has gone by the way now. I guess the cave is worth seeing whether you sing a song or tell about it. They tell them about the geology now. Maybe it's interesting to tell what happened 200,000 years ago. But I have always felt – I may have been alone in that – that a visitor to this or any other park, he enjoys something that he feels he is a part of. In fact, now and then when they'd sing "Rock of Ages" some of them would break out in song and sob. I've had some great big men comment on that. Sir Harry Lauder, who is just about the most famous traveler in the world, he went through the Carlsbad Caverns and at the end of that ceremony he asked to

say a few words. And he said, "I'll tell you folks I've been everywhere in this world, seen everything, but I have never felt so close to God as today as I stood at the base of the Rock of Ages in the Carlsbad Caverns." And that compliment, coming from Sir Harry Lauder, offsets a whole lot of the comments and opinions of thousands of other people who you might say didn't like it.

Tom Boles: I don't know but three years I was there – I don't know but three what you might call official objections. One fellow I – he was a Jewish rabbi. Now if there is anything that's tolerant it's a Jewish rabbi. I don't know why he should object to it. And another was an admitted atheist. And another one gave his address as Squirrel Island. I don't know where Squirrel Island is, but that was his address. For one that didn't like it there was ten thousand that did like it.

Tom Boles: But as I say, you can still go through the caverns even if you don't have that. They like to go through. They like to feel they walk through; they get a whole lot more out by walking through the cave than go to a moving picture show and sit in a seat and have. They like to hear about Jim White; they like to hear about maybe 200,000 years ago when all this was underground; they like to hear about Jim White spending three days going in and out, finding his way. They feel that here, thirty or forty years after, they are going over Jim White's route and enjoying it just as much as he did. And as I say, it's a great show, it's a great show; and I've had high cooperation with the employees out there putting on those ceremonies. It has always been a sense of high gratification to me and to my men out there to see people by the millions enjoy a little ceremony which we put on there most every day.

Tom Boles: Thank you for giving me a chance to say that.

Herb Evison: Well, I'm glad to give you the chance to say that, Colonel.

Herb Evison: While we were talking a while ago you mentioned Ernie Pyle's visit to Carlsbad. Now I think you and I both feel a good deal the same about Ernie Pyle, which is compound of tremendous admiration and affection, even though I never even saw the man. But you did; and I wonder if you couldn't tell a little something about your meeting with him.

Tom Boles: Yes. It was at a time – I can't say what year it was, between the wars of course – Herb Maier, who was acting – he was regional director at that time – he was with a group of four or five National Park officials I think from Washington, down at the hotel, Caverna Hotel, and I went down to accompany them out to the cave, and Herb says, "Tom," he says, "don't bother about me; you concentrate on Ernie Pyle." Well, I had not – didn't

know who Ernie Pyle was; I told him I didn't know. He says, "You'll know before the day is over. You just stay right with him."

Tom Boles: Well, I met him. He looked like a little dried-up Boy Scout, small, bald-headed. His wife was with him, Jerry. So out there we went through, and I didn't see him make a single note, but he went all the way through, and everybody wanted to meet him, of course. And as we sat in the lunchroom, underground lunchroom, why, Ernie Pyle says, "It's remarkable how thousands, hundreds of thousands have gone through here and you don't see any names on the wall or no evidence of vandalism." He says, "Why is that?" "Well," I says, "we, in our talks, we try to impress the visitor that after all this is his cave, and when you give them a sense of ownership it carries with it a sense of pride. They'll not only leave it alone, but they'll keep the other fellow nearby from marking it up."

Tom Boles: He says, "No names at all?" And I says, "No. If you're looking for names there's just one place to look for them. You go in the restrooms and the walls and the doors, I don't know what they've got on their mind, but there's where they register. Their names are on there." I said, "If you're going to believe me, the women's restrooms have more names than the men's restrooms. They don't write any smutty poems or anything like that: they just register."

Tom Boles: After we finished our lunch, I sat between him and his wife. Jerry Pyle – that's his wife – said, "You must excuse me. I've got to go to the restroom, and, Colonel Boles, I expect I ought to borrow your lead pencil, shouldn't I?" And she came back in a few minutes just giggling to beat the band. And I said, "What did you find?" She said, "I found all those names all over the door, and the very top one is a woman from my hometown that I know."

Tom Boles: But Ernie Pyle was tremendously impressed with that. Later in his life when he wrote a book and picked out his ten best stories to put in that book, one chapter is his trip through the Carlsbad Caverns and the Rock of Ages. After he left through here, he made a trip through different places. I'd get cards from him saying "I've seen something big but not as good as Carlsbad Caverns." His plane crashed on the coast of South America one time. He didn't get hurt; nobody was hurt; he landed on a sand bar; but he sent me a card, said, "I've just been in a plane crash, but it wasn't as exciting as the Carlsbad Caverns." I've got that card yet.

Tom Boles: But Ernie Pyle, he is – he moved to New Mexico, and of course he died in Iwo Jima. But they have a museum up in Albuquerque of Ernie Pyle's home; this is where he called his home. He said one thing he liked to live

in Albuquerque, he'd get letters from friends there wasn't one out of ten who could spell the town right.

Herb Evison: I didn't get that, I'm sorry.

Tom Boles: He said the word "Albuquerque" was so hard there wasn't one out of ten of his friends could spell it right – Albuquerque. I don't know as I can.

Tom Boles: But we had a lot of famous people through there, as I say – Harry Lauder. It might interest you to know about Will Rogers.

Herb Evison: Oh, yes.

Tom Boles: Well, we used to have these Governor's Days when all the school children would go there and come through. And that was before we had the elevator. And the Governor would come down. On one of these days the Governor that year was Governor Arthur Seligman, and he walks in—

Herb Evison: Seligman?

Tom Boles: Seligman – S-e-l-i-g-m-a-n. He's a banker from Santa Fe. Well, as he walked out, it was a long walk and just ahead, why, the lady he helped push up the trail was a pretty fat girl and she just about wore him out and wore herself out. And he told me at the top, he says, "If I don't do anything else, I'm going to ask for an elevator for this place." I said, "Well, you've got enough authority for a request to carry weight."

Tom Boles: And he made the request, I think, and eventually we got the money for the elevators.

Tom Boles: It might interest you to know that the first thing for an elevator was a concessionaire that had a lunch room down there, he – Mr. Letts – he negotiated with oil drillers to drill a twelve-inch hole down to the lunch room so they could haul food back and forth. And I thought of making it about eighteen inches and then we could haul a person out in an emergency. Then the Park Service appropriated for a shaft. We dug from the top and we dug from the bottom and made a very close connection in the middle. We blew the gap through I think on the tenth of April, 1930, Mother's Day; and on that day Will Rogers and his wife Betty were in the caverns. We invited Will and Betty to get in the bucket and be the first passengers up through the elevator shaft. Betty wouldn't do it; she said, "I'll walk out with Tom Boles," – I had known her for years – but Will got in the bucket, and Will Rogers was the first passenger to ride the bucket out of the Carlsbad Caverns. And he wrote over a column about his experience and what he thought about the Carlsbad Caverns and being the first one in the bucket.

Tom Boles: And I might say that Governor Seligman, when we finally got that elevator, before we got it all fixed a very famous American author, Hamlin Garland, – he was the dean of American authors; I think he lived to be about ninety years old and wrote many famous books – Tales of the Middle Border and all that; he wrote all about a big cave in Mexico. But he and his wife were coming here, and Horace Albright telegrammed me that Hamlin Garland and his wife would be here, an elderly man; we'd want to show him everything but don't take a chance of him getting hurt in any way.

Tom Boles: So, Mrs. Boles and I went in with Mr. and Mrs. Hamlin Garland, walked in. Then when we got to the elevator shaft – it was already through – we had made up a little box like an elevator, with a single cable on it, you know, and had the rails in there, so we had a two-by-four with notches in it to hold the rails to keep from spinning. And we came to the end of the trip and I said, "Now, this is not an elevator, but we'll take you to the top." A single wire: I think it was about three-eighths of an inch, just enough to carry it.

Tom Boles: So, we put Mrs. Boles and Mrs. Garland, they made the first trip up. Then they came back and took Mr. Garland and me out. Then he asked me when we got to the top, he says, "Why did you send the women up first?" "Well," I says, "Horace Albright told me not to take a chance with you, and I thought I'd just test it out with those two girls."

Tom Boles: But when the elevator finally got in shape, there was one January they had a New Mexico Press Association met in Carlsbad. We invited them over to go through the cave. Governor Seligman was there again. And so, when we ended the trip and brought them to the elevators, I says, "Governor Seligman, this is your elevator. You get in there and take them up." And he turned on the lever and took them to the top. Then I asked him, "Do you want to go?" And he says, "No, I like it. I'm going to keep on running it." And he ran it about fifteen or twenty trips taking people out. So, my first elevator boy was Arthur Seligman, Governor of New Mexico.

Tom Boles: Other Governors followed through with their big crowd. The Governor's Day started out with only thirty-six students going through. The invitations would go out in the spring about the close of the school year to the senior classes of New Mexico; they were signed by the Governor and by me as superintendent. And they would all come here. And some of the classes from Texas and other places would come. Well, we wouldn't draw the line: the more that would come the better. In fact, Dillon was the first one at it, and I told him we had established a Governor's Day.

Herb Evison: Who was that?

Tom Boles: Governor Richard Dillon. That was twenty-some-odd years ago – oh, more than that. So, after he got a few letters back he says, he called me up, he says, "Boles, I am getting replies on that and I may show up there with five hundred kids. Can you take care of them?" I says, "Governor Dillon, that's a big cave. You bring a thousand, we'll take care of them."

Tom Boles: Well, when they came in, the school busses coming in just like yellow pumpkins out of Cinderella, you know, with kids all coming out; and when we counted those that day we had 1700 school kids through there; and that was a big one. They built it up a little bit every year until finally the biggest one was when Governor Hockenhull was Governor, we had 2,800 in one group. Now they've had more than that people in one day's travel, but they have never had any more than that in one day's group; it took a long – it reached from one end from the lunchroom back to the top.

Tom Boles: And an interesting thing was when Governor Tingley – he had two Governor's Days there and everything went – he had about, oh, 1,000 go through with him – and everything clicked right. I made my talk at the Rock of Ages, then the Governor would make a response; then we had Mrs. Elizabeth Garrett, who is the daughter of Pat Garrett, from Billy the Kid, and she wrote our State song, and she would sing the verse and then the crowd would sing the chorus. She had a voice like a foghorn, you could hear it all over the cave.

Tom Boles: Well, when Seligman got back from the lunchroom where we were going to load on the elevators, why, he says, "I understand you have 2,000 here and nobody—"

Herb Evison: Shouldn't you say Tingley, not Seligman?

Tom Boles: Tingley; this is later than Seligman. He says, "I understand you didn't have any accidents?" "Oh," I says, "may have had a skinned finger or something but there was nothing that needed any first aid to amount to anything." "Well," he says, "I want to congratulate you and your men for that. That's a wonderful job to handle thousands of kids over this underground trail and nobody bumped their head or anything else." And then he whispered over to me, says, "By the way, where's the restroom?" I says, "Right back there. Be careful now." There was a chain across there. Darned if he didn't run and twenty-five feet from me, he ran over that chain and we had to dress up his knee – the only first-aid was the Governor after he had congratulated us on that. Governor Tingley was very enthusiastic on that stuff; he just thought that was one of the high spots of his life.

Tom Boles: And the schools still send their people in busloads in spring, but it has got so big now, I guess, that—. Now, a crowd never scared me, but the thing

that bothers them now is to have two groups in the Big Room at one time, and if you turn the lights out on one of them, why, you have got to turn it out on the other, and the other one is liable to – you haven't got a buildup and the other one is liable to whoop and holler.

Tom Boles: But it was very impressive, and I have had generations of them since then.

Tom Boles: Another interesting thing I might tell you, Herb: We used to register the names – "Mr. and Mrs. John Smith" – and issued a ticket; carbon copy; then, "Susie, age ten; Johnny, age three." And one lady went through there, and she just put, "Baby, age three months" or four, I've forgotten. I made out I was very serious that they had to give a name. And, see, at the mouth of the cave I made a talk. "Have you named it?" "No." I said, "We've got to have its name." "Why," she said, "you just name it yourself if you feel that way about it." So, I forgot all about it.

Tom Boles: So, in the lunchroom I saw her in the lunchroom, and I said, "Did you name that baby?" And she said, "No, you go ahead and name it." I said, "Give me five minutes." Then I says, "I've thought of it. I'll name her Caverna – that's the Spanish for 'cavern.'"

Tom Boles: And her name is Caverna, and Caverna she grew up; came back now and then, and I got a wedding announcement, Caverna Clinch, and she says she has more fun explaining why she got that name and how she got it; and she lives now in Wichita Falls and I still get Christmas cards from her every year. But that was named in the cavern.

Tom Boles: But we have had old ones, little ones, young ones; perhaps the oldest one was one hundred years old; came back five days after he celebrated his hundredth birthday. The youngest was fifteen days old; his daddy and his mama carried it through on pillows. The fattest man was the Dean of Men from Pullman, Washington; he weighed three hundred and sixty pounds; he broke three stairsteps going through but he made the trip. The tallest man of course came from Texas – Jake Ehrlich of El Paso, Texas – 8 feet 6½ inches high; and when he would come to a low place he would walk on his fingers and knees, you know, just ploughing through. That was a real giant. And he was walking at the head of the line with the head guide, and a lady stopped me as I was walking along the line and says, "Are you the superintendent?" I says, "Yes." She says, "Can you give orders here?" And I says, "Yes, I can try to." "Well," she says, "I wish you'd tell old King Kong to get out of here. We can't see over him, under him, or around him." But that was 8 feet 6½ inches high – the biggest man in the world.

Herb Evison: King Kong, huh?

Tom Boles: But he fitted in with the cave, and he enjoyed it, every minute. We brought him to a basketball game that night in Carlsbad and made out like one of our players was missing at the high school and we'd have to run in one of our substitutes that didn't have a uniform, and led old Jake out from the dressing room, you know, and he could look down on the top of that basket, almost. He got a big hand on that.

Tom Boles: But as I say, I used to go through most every day. Superintendents now have so much paperwork that they just don't have the opportunity to get out and mill around with the crowd. But when a national park or anything is in its initial stage, I think the superintendent's big job is to sell the cave to the people—

Herb Evison: Or any other area.

Tom Boles: Yes. You go to a food market; the manager comes down and helps you pick out stuff, you feel flattered. That's why I like to go through. I go through now. I walked through with my daughter last week. That made my trip number 5,370. That is more miles than the length of the equator, and I'm going strong. I'm trying to make 6,000.

Tom Boles: I don't believe I'll make it, but as I say, I may go out and celebrate my eighty-second birthday this month and walk through again.

Herb Evison: What day this month?

Tom Boles: Thirty-first.

Herb Evison: The last day of January.

Tom Boles: As I say, every time I go out there some of the old-timers are still there that I was there, but I like to meet the new ones; they are fine people, and they show me and my family courtesies. Makes me have a pride in the National Park System which any old-timer had, because I expect if they visit anywhere else, they get the same kind of treatment. They invite me to make the farewell talk, and they like to hear the story just like you have; I get to the end of the line. And they've got some mighty good rangers out there, and it's the same whenever I go out there, they feel they just go out of their way to make me enjoy it.

Herb Evison: Tom, one of the remarkable things, as you note in your speech which you got on the tape, is the lighting in that cave. Now, if I remember rightly, Jack Emmert was one of the engineers who worked out that lighting; and how about getting a little of the story of that and of Louis Cramton's connection with it, on this tape?

Tom Boles: That's right. I'm glad you thought about that.

Tom Boles: I talked over the lighting and Mr. Albright approved it, and then Mr. Cramton, who was chairman of the sub-committee of Interior, he got the appropriation for lighting the Big Room. And Jack Emmert was sent here from Yosemite to direct it, and the Westinghouse Lamp Company sent Bill Ogelsby of Bloomfield, New Jersey, over to help him. He was a high illuminating engineer; both of them were good, and they worked together just as if they had worked together for years. And in fact, Ogelsby wouldn't take any expense money, because he said he was just proud to have had a part of the big thing.

Tom Boles: Well, we finished all the lighting of the Big Room and were about ready to turn it on, and Mr. Louis Cramton was due down here; and I said to the boys, "We've got everything ready; he got the money for it and he would just be pleased to see how these things light up. I'll have him out here in two or three days and it will be all set for him." Well, he went down, walked around right where the first switch was right near where the Giant Dome, and it's all dark down there, we're carrying lanterns. Mr. Cramton says, "Well, I thought you had some lights down here." "Yes, we're waiting for you to turn them on; we're saving that." "Oh," he says, "all right. Where's the switch?"

Tom Boles: And he turned on the switch and all the Giant Dome and everything just blazed up like it was exploded, and everything in the glittering light. And he was tremendously impressed with it. And that moment itself was a big pay for me and Jack Emmert and Bill Ogelsby. We had him to supper at my house that night, Bill Ogelsby and them, and they enjoyed.

Tom Boles: It might interest you to know that Ogelsby, who was with a – oh, a year or so later than that – General Harbord was in the cave with me and I told him about that Ogelsby lighting that, and he says, "Give me that man's name. I says, "I think he's with the RCA or some big lighting company in New York." "Give me his name." I says, "Well, what do you want his name for?" I says – he says, "I'm a director of that company and I want to get in touch with that man." And the next I heard of it Bill Ogelsby was in charge of the electrical exhibit on an entire floor on Lexington Avenue in New York, and he had one big room fixed up like the Carlsbad Caverns with control – button control – to light it up. So, we have a branch of the Carlsbad Caverns on Lexington Avenue in New York City.

Herb Evison: Tom, we're right close to the end of this tape. I want to thank you for one of the most interesting, most entertaining tapes that I have made. It has been a great pleasure to sit here and listen to you.

Tom Boles: Well, I have had interesting assignments and it has never been like a job to me; it has been a pleasure. What has added to my pleasure in being a

superintendent is to be on the job and see the people enjoying it just as much as they are, and that's what makes a good superintendent and that must make a good park. You sell your park to the public and that's what you're hired for.

Herb Evison: You betcha! Well, thank you again, Tom.

Tom Boles: Okay.

[END OF INTERVIEW]