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Herbert Evison's National Park Service Oral History Project, 1952-1999



Edwin C. Alberts  
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Interview conducted by S. Herbert Evison  
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EDWIN C. ALBERTS

REEL XCV

Including changes received  
April 15, 1964, including addendum  
(Page 21) in Apr. 13 letter

## START OF TAPE

Herbert Evison: This is Herbert Evison, and I am at the Midwest Regional Office in Omaha on this 14th day of September, 1962. Sitting across the corner of the table from me is Ed Alberts, who is the Midwest Regional naturalist and whose National Park experience goes back to a summer just thirty years ago when he became a seasonal ranger at Petrified Forest, and was a seasonal there during five – six summers – '32, '33, '34, '35, '36, '37, while he was going to the University of Arizona, or at least some of that time. And he became a permanent park ranger at Montezuma Castle in 1938.

Herbert Evison: Now, Ed, you were at the University of Arizona but I understand there's something a little unusual about your education and I wish you would tell me about it.

Edwin Alberts: Yes, it's a long story, which I suppose the spotty character of it could be attributed to the depression and lack of independent income in those years. You'd work a summer and if you had quite enough you would re-enroll in a semester, say at the University of Arizona where I was going in the 30's. I was majoring in geology and was doing pretty well. The difficulty was that in order to get a geology degree, a B.S. in geology there, you had to spend a summer session of field work, surveying, geological mapping, etc., which took six or eight weeks. And because of the economics of the situation I found it impossible to quite finish, and hence never quite got a degree although I had all the undergraduate hours which are normally credited. And on the Form 57 or whatever the form was in those days it appeared that I was obviously a well-trained geologist and that only inadvertently had I omitted putting the degree which I received. Of course for park ranger work in those days – I took a Civil Service examination I think a famous one for park rangers given in 1937, took it in Flagstaff with a bunch of fellows from Petrified Forest – and the prerequisites then did not require a degree. It was compensated by the previous experience which I had obtained at Petrified as a seasonal ranger the previous years, so it was quite legal and all. (See addendum, Page 21)

Edwin Alberts: The first park naturalist job was in Death Valley and that was late in 1941. The war had almost started, there was a man-power shortage, naturalists were hard to find who had any of the desired abilities of dealing with the public, knowing park policy, etc. And so, although the austere standards had prevailed in the 30's that definitely required the professional background, '41 the doors were opened to some of us characters who had experience and almost a degree, so I was able to become a park naturalist in Death Valley, of all places. It was a fine station, because I'm a native Californian and had spent many happy winter holidays in the Death Valley region long before it was a national monument. So I accepted the opportunity to become a naturalist more, I think, to get to Death Valley than necessarily to go into interpretive work, you see; although nearly all

this ranger work in the Southwest Monuments with Frank Pinkley, and so forth, had been interpretation almost entirely.

Herbert Evison: Of course it's always interesting, though, to find out what a man's motives were.

Edwin Alberts: Well, it's difficult to determine them, because you know my powers of recall are none too well developed.

Edwin Alberts: It was a very pleasant time in Death Valley, although unfortunately the war began and the travel dropped and the situation became unnatural. And I am sure most of those you interview will then go into a story of their war experiences, you know, heroism and all.

Herbert Evison: Nobody has so far.

Edwin Alberts: Really? Well, I won't, because I was never even accepted or drafted or interviewed. It's a strange thing. I stayed in Death Valley and did a lot of interesting things there. Old T. R. Goodwin was superintendent, one of the best men I ever had to work with. He loved the desert as much as I do – did, at least.

Edwin Alberts: Then in the middle of the war in '43 things were getting pretty tough in filling jobs anywhere, so I was quite arbitrarily moved to Carlsbad Caverns as park naturalist. Now down at Carlsbad Caverns, despite the war and gasoline rationing and all that, they were having very heavy travel. It was right on the highway between military bases and many people traveling on orders came through the Caves; they were going either to the eastern theatre or to the European theatre. So I had the unusual opportunity there of guiding more second lieutenants day after day through the Cavern than many lieutenant colonels today probably can say.

Edwin Alberts: I went down there as park naturalist and discovered that actually the job was one of chief guide, and that's another long story but there was an attempt made at that time to make the guiding program interpretive in nature. Prior to that apparently it had been sort of a, well, the term then used a lot was "herding" the people through the cave. And some of those fellows, old-timers, a little rough on the public; and my job as it turned out was to try to start an interpretive approach in cave guiding. And so as chief guide I had quite a large staff. I had only been myself in Death Valley. Down there I found I had fifteen or twenty permanent helpers and during the week-ends and summer season up to ten more.

Edwin Alberts: Well, it was the war, and men were hard to find who were not psychopaths or something of that sort, so we recruited women, and by the end of '44, say, as the war was reaching a peak and there were very

few men left, I had some fourteen women working for me, and generally called Brigham Young, you know, and all that, although I hasten to assure you, Herb, that our relationships were always on the up-and-up – almost always.

Edwin Alberts: Then at the end of the war there was this big reconversion and re-shuffling of jobs, so I went back to Death Valley, the old post, and stayed there for a couple of years more. And then in 1947 in the middle of the summer – July 1, I think – I went to Rocky Mountain National Park, a big promotion to a Grade 9.

Herbert Evison: Let me interrupt you here. Getting back to Carlsbad and these lady guides: Is there any darned reason why a woman can't do just as good a guiding job in Carlsbad as a man?

Edwin Alberts: I personally think a woman can do a better guiding job in that situation. I think women can do any sort of work that is somewhat monotonous in nature better than a man can. A man who is worth his salt wants to be more active, wants to feel he's achieving something, at least some variety; whereas in guiding it's the same thing day after day. And I feel that women – good women, not any woman but women who have the right personality, the airline hostess type and all – can do that work day after day and still smile, be cheerful, and find interest in it; the average man gets bored and is apt to transmit that boredom to the public with consequent deterioration of the program.

Herbert Evison: Doesn't that show itself in the fact that you get as men for those jobs generally speaking a lower grade man than you would expect to recruit for other jobs in the Park Service?

Edwin Alberts: I think that a man who felt that that was all he wanted to do would be lower grade. I think that the lower position grade – the lower salary, say, of those jobs – is important as an entering wedge. Many sharp young men come into the Service that way, but if he is good he will be pretty dissatisfied after a year of it, and I think that such jobs should certainly not be the refuge of old fellows who have pretty well got their steam out. If you can get women to handle those jobs as a career basis, I think the service would be better, but you would also want to have many young men using it for starting an entrance, because certainly you learn to deal with people there, you learn to give public talks, and you are seldom surprised at strange things that people do elsewhere, because everything has happened in Carlsbad, I am sure, from births to deaths.

Herbert Evison: Well, you think of it as a very valuable starting point and training grounds?

Edwin Alberts: I think so, indeed, something like Carlsbad. It's big, it's active, it's sort of like running a railroad; you've got all these large bodies of people in motion, you've got to be sharp all the time; plus the usual problems of people getting injured and running amok and getting intoxicated and drug addicts and that sort of thing. I recall incidents in which every one of those things occurred in my short stay there of two years or so.

Herbert Evison: I would be interested in knowing how unusual situations like that are handled. As you remember it, how were they handled?

Edwin Alberts: Well, in our time we had of course the women guides and a few men. The war was funny; there were some of us who were not rejected, we were just never called. I registered for the draft, for example, I think in Pinal County, Arizona, down at Coolidge you know; and evidently there was so many husky young men there that they never got down to me in the draft calls. And there were two or three others of us in that same situation. So we had a core of experienced men. Also we had three park rangers, a very small group of rangers. They generally were responsible for surface activities, but if we really had a wild situation one of the girls could phone up to the top and one of the rangers would come down. They were all appointed as deputy sheriffs. But usually the women were able to recruit help from the other travelers: epileptic seizures, for example, abusive drunks, that sort of thing, that the women often could handle with the help of adjacent men. You didn't have to have an elaborate police system at that time.

Edwin Alberts: Of course there were some crazy things that happened. I recall the old Rock of Ages ceremony one day when there was a small group, and an attractive woman sitting in the front row got mixed up – I think she was on some drug or other – and in the middle of Colonel Boles impassioned oratory arose and leaped over the stonework right in front as if she thought it was water, and we could hear her body rolling down below – that sort of thing; quite a crisis, you see. But our girl guide who was leading the party away sized it up and quite on her own arose and the people began to file out. And meanwhile a couple of fellows went down to see how the girl was doing. She hadn't hurt herself much, a little concussion, bruise, but still on drugs.

Edwin Alberts: Homer Black in the Washington office, by the way, still has the wound on his arm, I am sure. He was down there and was the first to go to her aid. She bit him, bit his arm. So many curious things, but they were usually handled by good judgment on the part of our people. We would brief them on these things, and every incident that happened was educational and everyone realized.

- Edwin Alberts: I recall during that incident, a real sharp fellow in the crowd, a man always thinking, walked through the group with his hat and accepted contributions from the other customers down there on the assumption that he was getting money for her help. We never saw him; if it happened, he is undoubtedly a big executive now. Colonel Boles' comments on it are unrecorded. It was the one time somebody stole the show from Tom Boles.
- Herbert Evison: You know, that's exactly the kind of stuff that I am looking for and it is something I am sure the person who goes through with one of those big crowds in Carlsbad without incident, very enjoyable, never even gives a thought to the fact that those things do happen down there in the bowels of the earth now and then.
- Edwin Alberts: It's somewhat comparable to running a big hotel, I think, or a railroad. I mean you deal with a thousand people and one of them is going to be a little bit different. Some strange things, yes. Carlsbad was interesting.
- Edwin Alberts: There are several other fellows now in the Service – Ernst Christensen at Everglades was a senior guide working for me down there about that same time. I mentioned Homer Black.
- Herbert Evison: Was Benny Gale there at that time?
- Edwin Alberts: No, Benny Gale replaced me there. Then he was in the Navy and when the war was over he followed me in that same position. I never met Benny for several years, then we had a great time, as you can imagine, comparing notes.
- Herbert Evison: Well, now, you went from Carlsbad then to Rocky Mountain?
- Edwin Alberts: No, I went from Carlsbad back to Death Valley, the old pre-war permanent appointment; something about, you know, these war service deals where, you know, were subject for the duration. So I returned to my original pre-war post at Death Valley, and things were still about the same. Mr. Goodwin was still the superintendent; Ted Ogston was still the chief ranger; and I became the park naturalist again. And as I say, went on from there to Rocky Mountain.
- Edwin Alberts: I was at Rocky quite a long stretch – nine years – about the longest I ever lived anywhere, even as a kid, uninterruptedly. Then I came here to Omaha in March, I think, of '56, so I've been here now, what? seven years or so; I guess I'm on my seventh year.
- Edwin Alberts: My career is rather limited in a way, you know, except back in the Southwest, to regress a bit, I had a most interesting job there a couple of

years with Frank Pinkley and Hugh Miller as roving ranger, which is interesting since no such job exists any more.

Herbert Evison: Yes, and I wish you would dwell on that a little bit, on what the responsibilities of a roving ranger were in the old Southwestern Monuments organization.

Edwin Alberts: Well, of course, to recall, in those days these were not autonomous areas, they were all administered directly, line authority from Coolidge, Arizona, where Frank Pinkley was the superintendent of the Southwestern Monuments which included, I think, about twenty-six different areas. And most of them were one-man stations - Canyon de Chelly, Navajo, and so forth – just one fellow out there. Perhaps he would be called the archeologist, perhaps custodian, frequently just a park ranger in charge. Well, they had annual leave due them of course, a month a year, and the problem was of having someone who knew a little bit about the operations to relieve them during that month. So they came up with the notion, well, we'll get a roving ranger; we'll headquarter him down here with us at Coolidge and we'll send him out when he's needed; we'll work out a leave schedule and we'll have him out holding down the fort, at eleven different monuments eleven different months each year. And that's the job that I took.

Edwin Alberts: That's the only job I ever bid in for, the only one I said I sure would like to have, sir.

Herbert Evison: It sounds to me like it would have been an extraordinarily interesting job.

Edwin Alberts: It was indeed, and by George! I was on it two years and got to see the Southwest more intimately I think than most of us have an opportunity to do. It was a fairly easy job too, to be perfectly candid, because you would go into this place, the understanding was that you really wouldn't do anything to upset his program, you know; you would answer the mail and say, "We are sorry Mr. Cronin is absent on leave, he will give your request immediate attention on his return," which was good because otherwise the letter might not be answered at all. But at the same time you had to be quite familiar with this area in case something did happen, like a fire, you know, or a visitor accident; so you'd have to spend most of your time exploring this park.

Herbert Evison: Which couldn't be too bad either.

Edwin Alberts: It was marvelous. Problems of quarters were considerable. We solved that. I was married then, yes. We bought a trailer, and back in '38 and '39 trailers were most unusual; and we drifted around, my wife and I, for those two years and it was very pleasant. Then we had a little girl, a little baby,



and the situation deteriorated rather rapidly, and it was then with some pleasure that I went to Death Valley; not only wonderful desert, but there was a house, you know, with flush toilets, a very rare thing in those days.

Herbert Evison: I am awfully glad that you insisted on going back to that.

Edwin Alberts: Well, it just occurred to me that was probably the most interesting work I have had.

Herbert Evison: I would think so, and I would like even to hear some more about it. Hell, there – excuse me – there must have been some rather interesting incidents. I presume you spent some time at places like Navajo and Canyon de Chelly where you had dealings with the Indians.

Edwin Alberts: Oh, quite a bit. Nothing particularly dramatic. I had always felt like the Lewis and Clark Expedition – they had no great adventures because it was well planned; similarly with this rather migratory life, no crises developed; but it was vastly intriguing, of course. I got acquainted with many Indians; forgotten them now. I think the most fun, though, was the opportunity to really get to know these sensational areas down there. I still am an old desert man, I'm still a Southwestern Monuments fellow.

Herbert Evison: Tell me this: I presume you must have been on at least one assignment at Navajo.

Edwin Alberts: I was out at Navajo a couple of different times. Of course I hit Navajo after it had become somewhat modernized. Jimmy Brewer had just inherited a brand new house, and although we lived in a trailer generally, we couldn't get the damned thing up beyond Shonto because of that terrific hill, so we had to live in Jimmy's house and that was pleasant too. Of course while I was there I took advantage to see Betatakin and Inscription House and Keet Seel, you know, the canyon there; even went into Rainbow Bridge – that was sort of under our wing – walked in there, slept on the rock, came back the next day.

Herbert Evison: I just wondered if while you were on assignment there you had gotten around to these detached areas, Keet Seel and Inscription House, which is something I wish I had gotten to do. I never even have been in Betatakin; I have seen it from above, because I went in there in 1948 with Ronnie Lee and Eric Reed and we went out there on the rock that looks down into that beautiful canyon across from Betatakin, which I think is one of the most beautiful ruins in the whole National Park Service.

Edwin Alberts: It is, without question. Of course my duties called me to Betatakin as often as possible. We had a trail leading down there. Of course usually whenever I visited these areas, in relief, the season was over. It was usually - in Betatakin it would be in December, and that sort of thing. But

even so, a few people did dribble out and you had to make sure there was no vandalism and that sort of thing. In fact I often took people down to the ruins, you see. I had had very little formal training in archeology, but all of us in the Southwest picked it up. It was like knowing about the ball teams, you know, it was a sort of hobby, a way of life. The Anasazi people were as close to us as the Oklahomans, say.

Edwin Alberts: And I think perhaps that experience in the Southwest with exposure to all these different fields – archeology, ethnology, even history, a place like Gran Quivira, as well as the geology and botany of the other areas – is what has given me this strong feeling that interpretation is one definite enterprise and that we are perhaps going backwards in trying to compartmentalize by scientific field of, you know, botany and biology and geologist, historian, etcetera, for interpreting it, for revealing the story. Scholarly work is different.

Herbert Evison: You won't get an argument out of me about that, for I feel the same way.

Edwin Alberts: Well, I'm a little disappointed. That's the main reason I brought it up, to jazz up this tape, you know.

Herbert Evison: Well, I am glad you did, because I feel that this fragmenting of interpretation is a very serious backward step.

Edwin Alberts: Well, I think so. In a sense it's its death knell, really.

Herbert Evison: Well, now, do you think of anything more? Were you down at Tumacacori at any time?

Edwin Alberts: Well, I didn't hit Tumacacori on duty. There was two or three areas that had a big staff – two people, say – and Tumacac was one of them, but I did go down there now and then. In fact, one of the nicest trips I ever had was driving Boss Pinkley down there and on to Nogales on a two-day junket of some sort. His health was good but he was not driving much, and when I was in at Coolidge as often on the loose pulley, as old Frank Winess would put it, you know, and so I would drive him occasionally to some of these places. And so I knew Tumacacori pretty well.

Edwin Alberts: Bandelier was another place I never worked, because it had a big staff. They had three permanent fellows over there, big deal there. But we had Arches, and Natural Bridges, and Aztec of course, Chaco, Gran Quivira. I hit them all, I guess, with the exception of Gila Cliff Dwellings. It wasn't until 1952 on annual leave that I got to get up into Gila Cliff Dwellings.

Herbert Evison: Well, that never had a custodian to relieve.

Edwin Alberts: No, this fellow had a ranch nearby, you know, a dollar a month.

- Herbert Evison: Now you talk about going on those trips with Boss Pinkley. Are you like most people that I know of who knew Pinkley a pretty great admirer of his?
- Edwin Alberts: Oh, indeed. You might almost – well, not disciple, but certainly yes, he's one of the most splendid men, human beings, I ever knew, really. He was a kind understanding boss, a man though who could be authoritative if the situation required it. I don't think he might succeed in today's situation, but back then when life was pretty primitive he had to be the father figure, I used to call him, of all these scattered people. He did that magnificently. I was there while he and Hugh Miller were working, and that was a pretty harmonious team, because Hugh brought in administrative details that were required. He never overdid it. And the Boss of course brought in this human feeling and this deep knowledge and love of the Service that sometimes you might think is vanishing today – well, not vanishing but being diluted, say, as we get more and more specialized and a bigger outfit.
- Edwin Alberts: There at his death – he had this meeting, you know, and that was a tragic thing, and yet in a way probably the best way he could possibly have checked out, with all his people. Finally had this gathering, by God! it took years, and they were all there, and he gave us this welcome, and died.
- Herbert Evison: Yes. Rather dramatic, when you stop to think of it.
- Edwin Alberts: Oh, was it dramatic! All the traditions of grand opera.
- Herbert Evison: But now I think of you chasing down from Coolidge clear down to Nogales from Tumacacori with him alongside of you, and of the kind of conversation that you must have had with him. Your memories of that – are they still pretty vivid? What kind of a traveling companion was he on a thing like that? Talkative, or did he think most of the time?
- Edwin Alberts: Traveling with me he was very talkative. I was a young fellow, not half as brash as I later became, I suppose, so I was a receptive listener and was full of curiosity and all that. I would say he talked a great deal of the time. I am sure that there are others who traveled with him much longer who could say what sort of a companion he was. I'm sure he was great. He used to take some long trips, two or three weeks, while the roads were terrible in those days, you know, and I am sure they seemed to leave with great reluctance; he must have been a fine companion. But I was never with him too long or too intimately, although I knew the kids, his daughter, and then knew Addison pretty well. He was going to school in Tucson some of the time while I was.
- Herbert Evison: Addison is the one who married the present archeologist - ?

Edwin Alberts: Yes, Jean, down at Mesa Verde, right.

Herbert Evison: Did he die?

Edwin Alberts: Yes, he was lost in a submarine in the Navy in the Pacific; a complete mystery as I get it. Of course it went down, but there was no record of just when; it was lost at sea in some way. A sad way for Addison to go, because he was as a real vibrant human personality too. But like to so many of us, he didn't stick too close to the subject. He would go to school a semester, then he'd go into Mexico and work, and that sort of thing.

Herbert Evison: Well, was he an archeologist?

Edwin Alberts: Well, I don't think so. He was a good practical one. I think he was training in electrical engineering, really. Yes, I'm sure that was his objective. He was probably an officer in that field when in the Navy business too, you know.

END OF SIDE 1

START OF SIDE 2

Herbert Evison: Now, let's go up to Rocky Mountain. I'd like to know something about your job there. Were you there by any chance, were you the naturalist in 1954?

Edwin Alberts: Yes. I do hope it's not too embarrassing a situation that you refer about.

Herbert Evison: No, merely that I was in there in 1954. Our son finished up at Colorado A&M and we came over to Rocky Mountain.

Edwin Alberts: I remember your visit. I imagine we might have met, shook hands or something at least. I recall that business, yes.

Herbert Evison: You were in there, you say, for nine years?

Edwin Alberts: Yes, I think it was nine years, yes. I went there July of '47. I don't know, it might be interesting to comment on the circumstances of that transfer, since – well, perhaps I shouldn't. It's interesting to me though, and you can delete this, you see.

Edwin Alberts: I was in Death Valley and just getting my teeth into the post-war program; some increased funds, the travel was coming up, even some likelihood of getting some permanent help, you know. I was very happy; I didn't want to go anywhere. T. R. Goodwin, our superintendent, was quite satisfied with me; he didn't want me to go anywhere either. Rocky Mountain vacancy developed – well, it was Raymond Gregg; he went East, I think, to Capital Parks. Dave Canfield, superintendent at Rocky, wanted to fill the job but he had his man picked; he didn't want me either. So I was in a

peculiar position of not wanting to go, my superintendent behind didn't want me to go, and my new superintendent didn't want me to come. Which was sort of interesting, and I think is repeated many times even today. Worked out pretty well. Dave and I got along beautifully. He was a wonderful man too. Speaking of men rich in human characteristics, Frank Pinkley and Dave Canfield I'd say pretty much tie in my veneration, I'd say is the word.

Edwin Alberts: But I sure had a hard time the first winter: born in California, lived in the desert, I'd never had a winter in my life. And the first winter there was quite an experience for a desert rat, I'll tell you, although nothing like fellows who go to McKinley or something; but I was a pretty unhappy fellow. In fact, I almost quit, I was almost ready to resign. Too much winter, too much this, that, and the other. But I was resigned to the situation and by spring things were much better, and I learned to love Colorado and Rocky Mountain, of course, in those many years I was there.

Herbert Evison: How much of a family did you have by that time?

Edwin Alberts: Well, by that time we had two little girls. Well, let's see, you know, what the hell, age seven and two respectively. And the girls grew up in Rocky Mountain, in Estes Park, you might say, that's their home town. I was interested traveling back there this summer on leave with my married daughter, the joy with which she was renewing the old home town situation with her husband, you know, showing him the little hide-outs they had and where they did this and did that; which was interesting: park kids have home towns too, you see. Little Frances, though, we left there before she was – oh, I don't know, seventh grade or something; so Frances, who is in high school now, Omaha is her home town. So that's the family situation.

Herbert Evison: Two sharply contrasting home towns for the two kids.

Edwin Alberts: Yes, indeed. And yet they're stronger ties than you realize, because probably there are three or four hundred Omaha families who have summer homes in Estes Park and a great many of the businesses up there are financed by Omaha firms. This taffy shop across the street, I think it has a branch in Estes Park in the summer; that's some sort of malt or something. So there's a strong tie.

Herbert Evison: You succeeded Ray Gregg?

Edwin Alberts: Yes. Raymond went to, as I say, East, I think the Capital Parks. And when I left there, let's see: well, Dave Canfield transferred to Santa Fe. You see I worked for Jimmy Lloyd for a year-and-a-half at Rocky, then I came back here shortly after. Well, once again, ironically enough – well, not

ironically, but I replaced Raymond at Rocky, then I come in here and work for Raymond in this office here in Omaha. He was then regional chief of interpretation. And that was sort of interesting, to once more be under his influence. He's a terrific fellow too, and his influence at Rocky Mountain lasted a year or two after he left, you know. That was one of the vexations: you give a talk to the Lions Club – “That’s pretty good, fellows. Say, did you ever hear Raymond Gregg give a talk?” I'd say, “No, I never did.” I had a chance to after I came here, and no kidding, I can understand many years later why those people out there were so enthusiastic about old Raymond. What a fellow!

Herbert Evison: Well, I want to get a taping of him out at this superintendents conference. I had expected to in St. Louis but then found the date conflicting, so I'm looking forward to that.

Edwin Alberts: Well, he'll be back to the scene of the crime, so to speak, because he was at Rocky a good many years too, you know. I think he came up there about '37 and except for his Navy work was there at Rocky, there were just those two naturalists ever at Rocky until I left, you see, except in the war I think Dave Condon held it down for a few months and Russ Grater was there a little while too.

Herbert Evison: I didn't realize that.

Edwin Alberts: But they were short-term things during the war, and then they were drafted, so to speak, or volunteered or something you know, that situation.

Herbert Evison: You spoke very admiringly of Dave Canfield, which indicates to me that he must have been sold on the naturalist program.

Edwin Alberts: Well, he was sympathetic to it; he was not anti-interpretive. He wasn't, however, completely enamored of it to the exclusion of other interests. In fact, we used to have some pretty good hassles trying to get a new slide projector or some added staff in the summer, you know; but if I could present telling arguments he would help, but he was not what you'd say a nature lover so much. He was a very good administrator, a very good supervisor of an activity with many aspects; he'd keep them all in pretty good balance. The best morale I ever saw in any park was under his administration.

Herbert Evison: Somebody described his performance there that he ran a happy ship.

Edwin Alberts: That's right. But it wasn't a sloppy ship; it was a happy and a pretty efficient ship, considering that so much of what we did we had to improvise, lack of funding and that sort of thing. But his maintenance crew – my God! they'd go out at any hour of the day or night to help some

program along, without thought of overtime pay or any feeling of being imposed on.

Edwin Alberts: He was one of the few superintendents I've worked for who knew that to get work from people you'd give them responsibility and authority. You knew just about how far you could go and how far you should go, and even if you goofed it up he'd back you up. You never felt that you were going to have the rug pulled out from under you.

Herbert Evison: He wouldn't let you down.

Edwin Alberts: No. He might chew you up privately, but not to disgrace you in front of your colleagues, that sort of thing. A very kind man, very.

Herbert Evison: Of course you're giving me a very interesting description of what a good park superintendent is, Ed.

Edwin Alberts: Well, I think that old Dave would be a pretty fair prototype, with some improvements in certain aspects, perhaps.

Herbert Evison: But on the whole you have described, I think, pretty well the good park superintendent, the guy who has real consideration for the people who work under him, who doesn't let them down –

Edwin Alberts: Well, yes; the recognition that they're human, that they have their inner needs, etcetera.

Herbert Evison: And furthermore, a thing that has always seemed so important to me, a recognition of employees' abilities and giving them an opportunity to use them.

Edwin Alberts: I think that's it. I used to feel it was somewhat like an old-timer with a team – you know, horses – but I feel the analogy is apt, that you can give them leash, you direct them but you're not constantly pulling back; or as I have often thought of it in explaining to my own people how I want them to work, it's analogous to the job of getting a sedan from here to San Francisco by Friday evening; I don't care if they go by U.S. 30, U.S. 40, U.S. 80 for that matter, so long as they get the sedan to San Francisco without any scratches by Friday evening; the route they want to take is theirs, you see. And Dave was that sort of a superintendent. You knew about what the objective was, you knew what you had to work with, and you would then proceed without further annoying interruptions with details. He'd let you make minor errors in order to achieve the objective; and that I think is a good administrator whether you're superintendent or a railroad foreman or the chief of the clothing department over here at Brandeis, you know.

- Edwin Alberts: And that's what all these guys are told in all these seminars and training sessions but what they always forget, it seems to me.
- Herbert Evison: Certainly very frequently. I just wonder about your Rocky Mountain experience, if there were any particular situations that you ran into there in connection with interpretation that, as you look back on them, might be interesting to mention.
- Edwin Alberts: Well, it's hard to summarize nine years without considerable research. Can't think of any real dramatic exciting things. He had a fine program there. Luckily able to get excellent seasonal people, half of them from the nearby schools, Colorado A&M and the University of Colorado nearby.
- Edwin Alberts: There was something in the air there at Rocky – well, I think the geography of the place lent itself to giving a great variety of assignments to all my seasonal men, so we never had boredom, we had remarkable enthusiasm by these fellows even the last day of their duty. Any lesson to another interpreter would seem to me to be to try to keep your seasonal people happy by giving them a variety of work, just do' t put them in a visitor center for two-week stretches, that sort of thing; keep them busy, change the program enough; schedule some trips maybe just for them, even though the attendance is small and you wouldn't schedule it regularly. If you have old Joe Blow and he has always wanted to go to Paradise Park, why not schedule it as a special hike and let Joe go up there on pay, sort of a reward for a lot of uncompensated overtime he probably has already put in.
- Edwin Alberts: Besides that, you let some taxpayers join him and go up there. In fact, one or two of our most popular trips really began that way, mostly to humor old Charley, say, who wanted to get up to some place, and we discovered it was a very popular destination. Then we'd look at it more carefully and find, why yes, this lends itself beautifully to an orderly exposition of the natural history of the park, you know, and it would become a standard part of the program.
- Edwin Alberts: The Rocky business was characterized when I was there, I was the only permanent naturalist; the seasonal help was about it. Quite a difference now: three or four fellows out there and all. Sometimes I think, though, that I got more work done with the seasonals than the permanent staff has been turning out of late. We didn't have many forty-hour weeks in the summer and that sort of thing. Sometimes I feel the harder you work people, if you work equally hard, the more fun is in it and of course the more work gets done too.
- Herbert Evison: I think that's a very good bit of philosophy, Ed.



- Edwin Alberts: Well, it's interesting. But you can't do it now. We're not unionized but progress, you know, in social arrangements with respect to work hours certainly can be held back. And I'm sure that if we have any seasonal naturalists who want to work an extra day or two without pay, that drive is taken advantage of in most parks in some ways.
- Edwin Alberts: Yes, Rocky Mountain was a very interesting place. I think the most rewarding part of my work there was getting acquainted, developing lasting friendships with the various nearby institutions, the universities, the museums in Denver, and that sort of thing. And Dave Canfield was great for encouraging such contacts and frequently involved in joint efforts with them, which I think was always good.
- Edwin Alberts: Of course at Rocky nearly a million people live within a few hours' drive and it's almost a metropolitan park situation, although it is a fine pristine natural area; and the job there then deals more with city matters than some of the more remote western parks – to the disadvantage of your own contact with nature, though. You couldn't very often get loose to take these hikes yourself in the summer season. September, though, was always the time when we would get out and renew our feeling of kinship with the world about us.
- Herbert Evison: A very good phrase, too.
- Edwin Alberts: Ah, yes; a very articulate young man, Mr. Drury said, I recall, once.
- Edwin Alberts: Speaking of men I greatly admire, he was one.
- Herbert Evison: Oh, yes; very articulate.
- Edwin Alberts: He was down at Carlsbad. Well, one interesting point, perhaps: I was down there at the time when the Rock of Ages ceremony was done in. Mr. Drury and Tom Vint – oh, quite a group of distinguished gentlemen, most of whom have now retired, made a visitation. Colonel Boles gave them the full treatment. He thought he was really going to keep the program there, you know, but through his efforts, by George, he knocked it in the head. It was terrible, they thought, and I had to pick up the pieces of the guide program without the Rock of Ages.
- Herbert Evison: What difficulties did that involve you in actually, Ed?
- Edwin Alberts: Well, there was a great public wave of protest. To most of them it had become a religious service; it was something like – oh, removing the head of Jefferson up at Rushmore, say; I mean to many of the people, particularly the Texans. Those people are very devout fundamentalists in religious persuasions; and then to them it was a very moving thing. Well, it was; it was corny but it was real moving. It had to go, there's no doubt of

it, the way it was done, because it effectively tied up the whole cave during that period of darkness.

Edwin Alberts: Yes, if we had time and a jug I could give you some great stories about the Rock of Ages, the funny things that happened then. Of course in my time we no longer had a quartet of, you know, living bodies singing; we had a recording on a machine out in the midst of the stalactites and a great rheostat apparatus, and the rear guide would slip off, you know, and at the signal turn the lights out, put the record on, and then slowly turn the lights on with this great rheostat apparatus.

Edwin Alberts: But particularly funny was the lady guides I had, you know, who would wander out there and the old machine was leaking juice and they would always get a little shock, you know, when they turned the rheostat just a little bit too far, and that would alarm them and it would open up and go off, in some very strange effects, I tell you. And my guides, they loved me, I think, but they carried it to extremes. When I was giving the Rock, which was on small parties and all, the old ceremony deteriorated, because they loved to turn the record over; and so instead of the hymn Rock of Ages one called – what the deuce was it? – I Love to Tell the Story would come out through the loud speakers, you know, and little tricks these people played on me, you know. But I wasn't disturbed by it and the public didn't really know the difference. So I insisted everybody – they played it on others sometimes too, – I'd say, "God damn it, fellows, look at the label; make sure it says Rock of Ages, see?" But down in that humidity, you see, the labels would get sticky and could be peeled off, and some wise guy switched labels on us once. Oh, it was a riot, those small parties. The Colonel had the big 2,000 crowds, see, and then the rest of us could play with these smaller groups before and after.

Herbert Evison: Well, now, when I went in there – which I think was late in 1940 – the Colonel gave the ceremony, but was that a regular part of his routine?

Edwin Alberts: Yes, almost every day, Sundays and holidays included, he would come out to the cave. He had his office in the town of Carlsbad and seldom came to the park to inspect things until – oh, he usually showed up about 10:30. He wanted to see the size of the crowd and he wanted to mingle with people, and he was a remarkable old boy too, a very warm human being. He was not quite as good a superintendent perhaps as say Dave Canfield, but he had warmth to him. And he loved his people, he loved that cave, he sort of fathered it from its very earliest days, you know, and that was his life, to come out and watch the people go through. And the Rock, or the big part of the ceremony, was given at about 2:10 p.m. and he was always on deck to give that talk, which he developed in about 1928 and hadn't changed one bit, and it was a little out of date; I mean geological research showed

that some of the statements he made were not true at all. But what he particularly loved was to recite the attendance from different States, you know. He had a couple of girls upstairs, that was the thing they did. Each ticket that was given to people, they had to sign their address, name, and home town, and that was all busily put onto a sheet and at 2:10 he knew exactly how many came to the cave that day and what States they were from, and of course Texas always the big one. I don't know, perhaps California, was next, you know, and New Mexico was way down the line – the State in which the cave is located was always low.

Edwin Alberts: So the Colonel would read Alabama, Arizona, Arkansas, and so forth, rather small figures; go all the way through but he wouldn't read the top five till the last. Then he would build up, you see: "Illinois 822 people; California 920." Of course all the natives would clap. Then they would get bigger and the claps would get bigger, and finally he would always end, "And Texas 1258," and then it was pandemonium, you know, and hats were thrown in the air and screams and shouts. Oh, it was a gay time. That was at the Rock of Ages; it was after all the lights had come on and the sacred flavor had vanished, and then he'd give this big deal. Well, you can see why that was just what people loved.

Herbert Evison: I wonder at the shouting and so on in there, whether it ever did any damage, the reverberation of that sound.

Edwin Alberts: Evidently not. The shouting certainly didn't. The seating of all these people certainly did. It devastated a vast area of formations, delicate lily pads, stalagmites. They had seats for perhaps three hundred people, benches. Well, two thousand people – obviously 1700 of them had to be parked down elsewhere, and it was a pretty grisly scene, really: all these people crowded out there, you know, sitting on little stumps, sharp objects. It became worn down and devastation is the word.

Edwin Alberts: With a big crowd it was also kind of funny, because the last hundred people had no idea really what was going on, but they see these people sitting, so they sit. It's at the rear that you put the guys who have been drinking too much, you know, and various odd types, and many of them didn't know what was going on. And they'd shout the minute the lights – "Hey, the lights are out," you know. Every now and then you'd hear somebody drop his bottle, you know. I mean it was a travesty of an inspirational thing when those big crowds were there in those conditions; you couldn't have enough guides to handle it properly. So in a way it's just as well it's out, but what surprises – well, not surprises, what bemuses me now is this big new bit on sound and light programs, you know, brand new, something tremendous coming to the Park Service. They're talking about it for Rushmore, you know, with music and lights and all – well,

that's exactly what this thing was that old Colonel Boles dreamed up back in '28. And if it weren't that it's done in this small chamber and all – really it's a big room, but it's a pretty small place for 2000 people – that would be a tremendous thing that Disney would be performing now, I am sure.

Edwin Alberts: Yes, you ask anyone who was at Carlsbad before '44 , I think was the year it was eliminated, and ask them about the Rock of Ages you'll get a spirited response. And nearly all of the men can mimic Colonel Boles' talk perfectly. I forget it. Cal Miller, if you ever run into him, he's got it down pat. He was there many years.

Herbert Evison: Yes. He's still in the cave business, incidentally.

Edwin Alberts: So I understand, down by Ash Fork. I knew old Cal at Aztec and also at Petrified Forest. He's really a salty character, a real wonderful man.

Herbert Evison: Yes. I last saw him I think when he was assistant superintendent out at Teton, back in 1955.

Edwin Alberts: Well, I'm sure he was much happier working down in the Southwest as a small area superintendent than he was in the administrative business up in Teton. Cal was a real westerner.

Edwin Alberts: Well, as I say, I have had very little excitement but a lot of interesting experiences. It's over twenty-five years of it now, and I don't know how I'd appraise it. It has been a rewarding life, somehow, certainly not monetary-wise.

Herbert Evison: Still you eat regularly.

Edwin Alberts: Yes, much too regularly perhaps. But it has been a most pleasant life. I don't know – I'm sure anyone fifty, which I will be very shortly, looks back, no matter what he has done, and he wishes to hell he'd done something else. If he's got a million dollars he wishes he had made ten million; and in that sense sometimes I think, gee, my talents have been wasted. And then I think, my God no, what a wonderful life it has been. But if a real sharp geologist asks me about National Park Service work I generally discourage him. I don't know if it's the best job for a professional man, I don't know.

Herbert Evison: Ed, you were working for the Park Service all through World War II when you were registered for the draft and you never were drafted. I would like a little dope from you on what the wartime situation was.

Edwin Alberts: Well, yes. It was a strange time. It was a time of austerity, the funds were very limited, in many park areas the travel was practically gone. But at the same time the forests had to be preserved from fire. There were in many

areas astonishing numbers of people visiting the place. And as we said before you turned the tape on, it struck me that this might be an aspect of park work that isn't normally thought of because most of our sharp people were out in the war. There were some of us who just waited, waited to be drafted. I think my situation was I was probably age thirty or something, and the different regulations about drafting, if you're over thirty with children you were in a lower category, etcetera. Anyway, I stayed.

Edwin Alberts: And running the cave guiding program at Carlsbad, it was an interesting psychological situation, because I realized the clear and present danger; you wanted, you know, to contribute to the war effort, at the same time you had to provide cave guiding service, and you didn't want the few men you had to be drafted and to go volunteering. And it was sort of a turmoil in your mind every day. God damn! another great reverse on the Russian front, and here you've got a pretty fair physically sound man working for you: should you encourage him to go register or should you keep him there to keep the park functioning? and that was quite a problem went on for a couple of years, and quite a few fellows would be able to contribute to that. Newton Drury was the Director then and he had to handle this on a national scale, and I imagine he had many conflicting drives within his brain.

Herbert Evison: I am sure he did.

Edwin Alberts: But we did keep a nucleus together, and sometimes I think that perhaps those of us who were out doing this unpraised work may have helped hold things together as well as if we had gone out and fought some campaign in Texas. I don't know.

Edwin Alberts: We did, you know, a great deal of advance planning work then, on-the-shelf planning, it was called. A lot of that I am sure later became incorporated into the Mission 66 plan, you see. We had of course to look at the accusing glances of mothers who had just lost their sons in a war; here you were, apparently available; why not you? why their sons? We had that psychological problem to overcome. It was a time of some interest, all right.

Herbert Evison: Some mental turmoil.

Edwin Alberts: Considerable.

Herbert Evison: In handling people who visited Carlsbad during that period, did anybody ever directly reproach you?

Edwin Alberts: No, never. That was interesting. Nor any of our people, really. I think the Selective Service system was pretty well accepted by people. They realized they didn't know why, but this fellow must somehow be

considered more important here than there, plus of course the - .  
Interesting too the fact that probably over 80 per cent of our travel were directly involved in the military. I think I mentioned how many shave-tails I had to order around in the cave, graduates from nearby Air Force training schools, etcetera. There was never any feeling that you were a queer or a slacker; none of that; but within yourself you wondered. I think if it hadn't been for the fact that I knew every month I would be drafted next month, I would have gone and volunteered. But I did have a family, and I figures, "What the hell! another month I'll be in with my buddies," you know, but in my case I never did.

Herbert Evison: Well, I think that's a very interesting lot of comment, Ed, and I'm glad we went back to it.

Edwin Alberts: It's a phase you might not encounter with most of the fellows you will interview.

Herbert Evison: And it is good to get that comment on tape, and by doing it I have just about filled up this tape we are working on, and it's getting up close to lunch time, so I think we can call it a day on this.

Edwin Alberts: Well, for the record, Herb, let me express my thanks at being invited to participate in this historic project, sir.

Herbert Evison: I am thoroughly satisfied that you were, I'll tell you that.

END OF TAPE

Addendum supplied by Alberts in letter of April 13, 1964 to Evison for inclusion where marked on Page 1.

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Edwin Alberts:       Years later, after I'd become well established as a park naturalist at Rocky Mountain, some snoopy personnel clerk discovered the absence of a B. A. for completion of education. After considerable head-scratching and scouting the bushes, I worked out a deal whereby I commuted from Estes Park to Boulder, Colorado, and picked up sufficient credits to get a B. A. in geography, of all things. Now this was not as easy as it sounds, because at the University of Colorado it was necessary, in order to graduate, to have the equivalent of two full years residence on the campus. This meant that I spent a year and a half drifting down to Boulder three or four days a week to pick up some 65 hours in order to qualify, although all I lacked for the University of Arizona matriculation was 8 or 10 hours. When I wasn't at Boulder, I was on duty at Rocky Mountain, and for a year and a half the only days off I can recall having were Christmas and New Years! Oddly enough, I thrived on this circumstance and made some remarkable contacts down there with fellow undergraduates which I now view with deep nostalgia. Having finally got the union card, my future opened up and after six years at the same grade which I had before, I got a break and came to the Omaha office.