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Allen C. Altvater, Sr.
April 7, 1971

Transcribed by Beverley A. Foltz
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ORAL HISTORY INTERVIEW

OF

ALLEN C. ALTVATER

INTERVIEWED BY S. HERBERT EVISON

Apri1 7, 1971

Tape Number 51

ALLEN C. ALTVATER - 1897

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TYPED BY: Beverley A. Foltz

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START OF TAPE

Herbert Evison: Today is April 7, 1971. I'm Herb Evison and this morning I am in Sebring, Florida, at the home of a longtime friend of mine, Allen C. Altvater, Sr., Allen, I want to get on this tape first the basic facts about you. I described them a while ago and you immediately came up with a comment that what I was after was obituary material. Well, whether obituary material or not, I want to get on the record when and where you were born, something about your people, your education, matrimony, children, so on.

Allen Altvater: Well, that's unique. I was born December the 26th, 1897, in Bradford, Ohio. Family moved to Indianapolis, Indiana, in 1906, and there I went to the Indianapolis schools and the high school there, but when I got to the point where I knew better, I moved to Florida. Anybody can't help where he's born, but he can use discretion when he gets old enough. Now in 1926, I married Mary Estes who was also born in Indianapolis, moved to Florida at an early age, and we had only one son. He is a junior and he has a son who is a third. I can think of no higher compliment than that. We also have three other grandchildren of whom we are proud, but that's the size of our family. I do have a sister. Now my parents were from Pennsylvania and Ohio. Father came from Pennsylvania, he was a master mechanic on a railroad and, of course, it was thought that I should follow the family trade and so I went through an apprenticeship in the machine shops, but that life was not for me. I didn't like it. I have been associated with several jobs. One of 'em was about what you'd call a city manager for the city of Sebring, but the two jobs that I look back at with the most satisfaction was the superintendency of C.C.C. camps and also my engagement with the Seabees in the late war. Both of 'em were similar. They dealt with handling young men and mechanical equipment and both of 'em were most satisfactory.

Herbert Evison: Now before you became superintendent of a C.C.C. camp, which I believe was under the Forest Service, you must have had a number of other jobs around here. I take it that you were the mayor of the city after your C.C.C. experiences, is that correct?

Allen Altvater: No. No, I was never mayor, I was on the city council at one time, but previous to C.C.C. work I owned a theater here and I served eight years as fire chief and then I believe the title of this city job was superintendent of public works, but it amounted to the same thing as a city manager. Of course, it gave a great deal of experience and from that I went into the C.C.C. at Oldtown, in a forestry camp.

Herbert Evison: Now, where is Oldtown?

Allen Altvater: Oldtown is on the beautiful Suwannee River at the crossing of U. S. 19 and the Suwannee River and it is a beautiful location, but unfortunately there was a high incidence of malaria fever there. I even contracted it myself and so it was thought best to discontinue the camp at that site because all the boys were having degrees of this fever. And the camp was abandoned there and moved to another location, but about the same time that they abandoned that camp or just before they abandoned it I had an invitation to come to Sebring through the good offices of Ray Vinten. He arranged that and then, of course, I was associated with the Department of the Interior in the National Park Service.

Herbert Evison: Now, that was to become superintendent of the camp assigned to Highlands Hammock State Park?

Allen Altvater: That's right.

Herbert Evison: Do you remember the year?

Allen Altvater: That year was 1935.

Herbert Evison: I see.

Allen Altvater: I went to Oldtown in 1934 and stayed nine months up there and then came to Highlands Hammock and stayed there until the end of the C.C.C. program.

Herbert Evison: Yes. Now one interesting phase of this assignment of yours was that it brought you back, not only to a place where you had lived a long time, but to a specific area with which you had had quite an important connection for some years before.

Allen Altvater: Yes, that's true.

Herbert Evison: How about giving a little dope here on your previous connection with the Highlands Hammock area.

Allen Altvater: Well the history of Highlands Hammock, of course, is very interesting to me. I hope this doesn't sound like bragging now because I wouldn't like that to go in the record, but in 1929 and 1930 it was my privilege to be at

that time the president of a local Chamber of Commerce and in this same year an effort was made to set aside this unique primeval forest as a typical example of what is known as a "hammock" in Florida. Now just prior to that time was the end of the famous Florida land boom and during that period people took land that should have been preserved as examples of typical areas and cut 'em up into lots and of course promoted all types of farming, as hammock lands are very rich lands anyway and adapted to agricultural purposes. It would be natural that they be one of the principal targets for clearing 'em up and getting 'em out of circulation as typical examples, so a group of very well-known people - I mean nationally known people, like Rex Beach and Charles Donaldson and that type of person - attempted to get this piece of land in order to make it a part of a park system.

Allen Altvater: Now at that time Florida had no state parks, as you know, and there was no effort being made at that time to set up a system of state parks. There had been some efforts made toward the Everglades area as a national park, but it hadn't gotten very far either. So this group that was known as a Tropical Florida Parks Association was formed with the purpose of acquiring this piece of land consisting of six or seven hundred acres and setting it up as a park to be preserved in its natural state; and memberships were sold for a dollar apiece, by the way. A dollar a year and that was supposed to provide money to buy the area and maintain it, believe it or not. (chuckling)

Allen Altvater: Now, of course, the C.C.C. program made it possible to get some interest in state parks later on, but this you'll realize was some three or four years ahead of the state park effort. Now through the kind offices of the Roebling family - who put, incidentally, around $400,000 into this effort to buy the land and to fence it and to provide water control and to provide a road system through it. Now when I say a road system through it, there was no effort made to change anything in there, merely to make it accessible so that people could get in and out and could see it; but they had provided the money for the establishment of it, but they put the burden on the local community for maintaining it. This became a very, very hard matter to work out. Various plans were proposed, but none of them seemed very practical. It even went so far one time as to consider leasing it out to a promoter who would come in and advertise it and get the benefit from it as long as he didn't desecrate it.

Herbert Evison: Yeah.

Allen Altvater: But that didn't come to a head. It was thought to be very unsatisfactory, but local county couldn't provide the funds for it.

Herbert Evison: This was depression time.

Allen Altvater: This was depression times and the local people didn't have the money with which to maintain it, so it was pretty dark day in the future prospects of the park; and there again comes the C.C.C. in. Now the C.C.C. wasn't approved for promotion of the Hammock, but the Garden Clubs of Florida had an idea of building a botanical garden and an arboretum and that was the approved camp activity. Now the other activities that related directly to the Hammock were more or less side issues. But....

Herbert Evison: Uh huh. At the start.

Allen Altvater: At the start; but since the people who were involved in the botanical garden and arboretum were essentially the same people who were interested in the Hammock it was a very easy thing to put some Hammock projects in there, but again the principal idea was to preserve the Hammock, not to improve it. No idea was given to any improvements of any kind, merely the preservation and making it accessible, of course.

Herbert Evison: Yeah.

Allen Altvater: Now the development of the botanical garden and arboretum went along beautifully until the war, but the war made it impossible to get any type of labor to maintain the botanical garden and arboretum and it also cut off the money supply before the improvement of it, so that was the end. The war ended it.

Herbert Evison: Yeah. Now there is no botanical garden there?

Allen Altvater: Not as such. The physical features are there, but the plants and - well there wasn't manpower enough to protect what was there.

Herbert Evison: Uh huh.

Allen Altvater: And as a result those exotic plantings that were introduced into there like, well, azaleas and camelias and those beautiful displays that we had there, those were stolen, what weren't stolen, of course, weren't maintained, so they soon died and were lost anyway, so one way or another the main planting – there’s still evidences there like the palm plantings and the bamboo planting; you can still see those evidences, but the beautiful pictures that we had in mind at that time didn’t materialize.

Herbert Evison: Yeah, but your work on the Highlands Hammock State Park did materialize and has continued to be useful for all the years since.

Allen Altvater: That's true; they lasted; when you realize now that they're 30 years old and still in perfect working order. You look at material evidences of the park. The things that you can now go put your finger on.

Herbert Evison: Yeah.

Allen Altvater: I have always felt that the C.C.C. was beneficial not particularly from the angle of considering what material things we got out of it, but rather the wide purpose for which it was originally established, I think.

Herbert Evison: Yeah.

Allen Altvater: You mentioned the recession or the depression of those times. We had many, many young men who were out of work and who couldn't get work and couldn't make money and who had no trades and all that sort of thing. The C.C.C. made them good men and I think of the broad picture of the benefit of this.

Herbert Evison: Yeah.

Allen Altvater: Here at Highlands Hammock Camp, we took a survey of a group of men that came in from Alabama. Twenty-six percent of those men could not read or write. They couldn't write their own name when they came in. Before they drew their first pay they had to be able to write their own name, as you remember; and I can remember that we on the supervisory personnel devoted two and three nights a week to teaching those boys something that would be of lasting benefit to them personally. For instance, in our park work there we had concrete block laying and stone masonry work. We had a class at night there that taught them how to lay that block and how to lay that stone and they went out on the job the following day and put that teaching into practice. At the end of their period they had a trade that they could work at and would serve them the rest of their lives. There's the material gain in the C.C.C. in my estimation.

Herbert Evison: Yeah. Of course, it seemed to be that one of those values to the boys was their ability to live in a group, to get along with each other, and to work as a team on those jobs that they had. Now, I remember your comment when you went into the Seabees at the beginning of the war. I think you found a lot of former C.C.C. boys who had acquired a good deal of ability in the handling of equipment and in the maintenance of equipment.

Allen Altvater: One of the responsibilities in my work in the Seabees, was handling heavy equipment and trucks and the selection of recruits that came to us. Without being told, we could pick out the men with C.C.C. experience by the way they took care of their equipment, by the way they handled it, and the type of work that they turned out. They had been indoctrinated so thoroughly in the C.C.C. that it was not a question of how much it cost, it was not a

question of how long it took to do a job, it was just a question of how you did it. In the C.C.C., you remember, we had inspection every Saturday of the equipment. The man stood alongside of his truck and he and the truck were inspected, the bulldozer was inspected and he was told to either get it in line or it was already in line and that was training that they couldn't get any place else.

Herbert Evison: Yeah. Now I strongly suspect that routine was not followed in every C.C.C. camp. I suspect that the way it was done at Highlands Hammock C.C.C. Camp was by no means universal. I strongly suspect that a guy named Allen Altvater had a good deal to do with the establishment of that routine out here, isn't that right?

Allen Altvater: Well no, I don't know about that. Maybe; it may be. I didn't get around very much then. (chuckling) I don't know how they worked it at other places, but I would gather it must have been a pretty universal practice, surely, because all these Seabees didn't come from Highlands Hammock Park, but you could tell by the care they took of their job, and the effort that they put into it and the type of boy maybe.

Herbert Evison: I suppose.

Allen Altvater: It could easily have been. Then, too, there were some boys involved in this that I made a little list thinking about this thing that it would be of interest to you, in the men that have been in camps with which I was connected. One of them came through to see me, stopped here one time just after the war, and he had made major in the service. He was an office man with the C.C.C.

Herbert Evison: Yeah.

Allen Altvater: But, he turned out to be a major after he got out of the C.C.C. and went into the service. I'm proud of that....

Herbert Evison: Yeah.

Allen Altvater: Because I was connected with him. I had another man stop in here one time following the war, you know, they established a system whereby a serviceman could get certain amount of schooling after the war. This boy went to school and became a druggist and now he owns three drug stores in Miami. Of course, it's the type of boy there again and we come back to it. Some of the men we had in the Oldtown camp were natives of Alabama but they married girls from the countryside around the camp and remained in the general area. Many established businesses and three of them were elected sheriffs of surrounding counties.\

Herbert Evison: Yeah!

Allen Altvater: Now here's a man, one of the outstanding men in the camp here that continued after the C.C.C. He went with the Florida Forest Service and he's now quartered at Lake City, I believe, if I'm not mistaken. I had a letter from him about a month ago. He has made a remarkable place for himself in the Forest Service. He's been the author of several books and has done a good deal of research work and documenting his research work. I ran onto him several years ago in the Elks and he is one of the high state officials in the Elks Lodge of Florida. Now that speaks well for him in my estimation; but one of the outstanding things that we have here locally, of course, again, some of these boys came in here, married local girls, and stayed here. We have several of 'em. One is a long-time employee at the Postal Department here, but one of 'em Charlie - (I don't know that I ever heard his last name but everybody in Sebring knows Mr. Charlie) - Charlie came to camp out here and went to work in the galley and if a can didn't have a picture of what was in there, he wouldn't have known what was inside that can because he couldn't read it. Charlie became one of the best men in the kitchen that I've seen in the camp and he was hired while he was still in the camp. He got a job with one of the local restaurants here when a hundred dollars a week was a lot of money, (that's been, what? Fifteen, twenty years ago?) Charlie was making a hundred dollars a week in this restaurant and he made the restaurant for the owner. There's a fella that got a trade in the C.C.C. that made him independent in his life as long as he lived. He just died recently, but as long as he lived he was in demand.

Herbert Evison: Yeah.

Allen Altvater: Before that time he could neither read nor write. That's what the C.C.C. did for a great many of these boys.

Herbert Evison: Yeah. Now Allen I want to go back again a little bit to the work that was actually accomplished there at Highlands Hammock. You told something about the arboretum and botanical garden and its unhappy fate and also made the point that what was done within Highlands Hammock State Park is still there. It's still in use. It's in good condition. And you emphasized the point that the basic effort was to make it possible for people to become acquainted with natural features of that area without use of the area spoiling them. Now let's get on the record some of the things that you did that accomplished that purpose of the park.

Allen Altvater: Well, of course the stress was always put on quality. For instance, there is the office building that is still out there. I can recall that the walls of that building went up window-high three times, but they weren't satisfactory. They didn't show the quality, so they were taken down and rebuilt again.

Herbert Evison: Were they masonry?

Allen Altvater: They were masonry walls. Now that's just one illustration of the point that I'd like to make, but the frame or timber structures out there were made from the forest. The boys cut the trees down, we had a sawmill there, we had a dry kiln, we had a planing mill and you followed that through from the very beginning until the finished product. In other words, they would fell the trees, they put it through the mill, they finished the lumber, built the building, and if it wasn't up to standard they rebuilt the building. The roof was made of cypress shakes in order to conform to the nature of the park, that was the thinking, at least, but it turned out that they weren't satisfactory, so they have orthodox roofs on them now; but it's with a great deal of pride that you can go out there and say that everything in here was made by the C.C.C., even the light fixtures. Those light fixtures were made in the blacksmith shop of the C.C.C. and they were fabricated of good material and the job was done, not with a view to how little it cost or how little time it took, but how good it was going to be, because nobody asks today how long did it take to build that building or how much did you save on it or anything like that. But you can swell out your chest with pride and say the C.C.C. built that building in its entirety. There are many culverts and water structures out there that were built by the C.C.C., of masonry work, that are just as good today as they were thirty years ago and they'll be good thirty years from now. They won't need any revision.

Herbert Evison: Now you talked about masonry, about work in the blacksmith area. That means that you had succeeded in finding men who knew these trades, and who at the same time could pass it on to others. Where did these foremen or supervisory personnel come from? Who picked 'em?

Allen Altvater: I know you're familiar with the fact that at first the C.C.C. personnel were largely political appointees. That existed here to some extent in the early days, but gradually they weeded themselves out. They couldn't stand the pressure and they were replaced by men who knew the work. We were fortunate out here in having good foremen, especially along toward the end, - men who knew how to handle young men and who knew their trades. You say, who selected? Ray Vinten was pretty much involved in that. He chose most of them. Of course, in that period, you understand, there were many professional men that were hard put to find work. They were worse off than laborers because a laborer could get a W.P.A. job or any kind of labor job, but an engineer, for example, - nobody wanted land surveyed. There was no construction going on, so engineers were pretty much out of the picture; and the same is true of landscape people and architects. Nobody needed architects, so good architects were available as

you found higher up in the work; and we were very fortunate in having good men in those capacities.

Herbert Evison: Oh, yes, one that I didn't mention in there. There was your mason, your blacksmith but also men good with machinery.

Allen Altvater: Yes, we had a good mechanic in charge of the - well we had two good mechanics. One of them was what we knew as an L.E.M. if you remember that?

Herbert Evison: Oh, yes locally employed.

Allen Altvater: Locally employed men. (Correctly - Local Experienced Men. (Evison))

Herbert Evison: Yes.

Allen Altvater: L.E.M., I remember the initials at least.

Herbert Evison: Yeah.

Allen Altvater: And well, going back to that now. There you had a broad spectrum of people involved in this service, both in a supervisory and in the enrolled personnel. I recall up at Oldtown we had a man, a Local Employed Man, who had been a professor of mathematics at Columbia University and about two or three nights a week we all assembled in the supervisory quarters, and he held a class in higher mathematics and even explained the solar system to us. That was the supervisory personnel that he was instructing. That was the reverse of this other procedure but we had all kinds of 'em; they weren't all illiterates. There were a lot of erudites there.

Herbert Evison: Yeah.

Allen Altvater: But, this man was working for forty-five dollars a month.

Herbert Evison: Yeah. (chuckles).

Allen Altvater: Again talking about the advantages of this – the boys learned too, the management of money. You remember a man making thirty dollars a month; that is a regular enrollee only got eight dollars of that to spend. The balance was sent home, or impounded if he didn't send it home – it was impounded until he got out of the service and those men learned a little frugality. It was benefit all the way around.

Herbert Evison: You know, I think of one particular incident which brought me down from Washington or Richmond, I forget which, but you held, out at camp, a fire school which I always remember as having been a very well conducted three-or-four-day conference and I remember you particularly as an instructor in that. Now what do you remember about that fire school and how it was arranged?

Allen Altvater: Well, you remember, we held several schools here. Of course, we felt that we were specializing on this teaching business because we required all of our supervisory personnel to have classes, but now this fire school was designed to cover supervisory personnel. It was not a school for enrolled men. It was to teach how to handle fires.

Herbert Evison: Yeah, but that was for supervisory personnel from a number of camps.

Allen Altvater: From all over the state.

Herbert Evison: Yes.

Allen Altvater: And so was the four-step method school if you'll recall.

Herbert Evison: Yes.

Allen Altvater: Did you attend that school?

Herbert Evison: Yes, I did.

Allen Altvater: Do you remember the snake episode?

Herbert Evison: No, I don't. The details of it have pretty well escaped me. One that I remember particularly though had nothing to do with the four step method, but one of the things that you trained in was structural fires.

Allen Altvater: Yeah.

Herbert Evison: And you had an arrangement there of wiring and you showed by example the kind of thing that could happen if a fuse blew out and somebody substituted a penny for it. I remember your turning on the switch and seeing the smoke start up from the overloaded wiring system that you had exposed. One of the very vivid remembrances that I have of that.

Allen Altvater: I'm going to put that in writing as at least one good thing I did in my life, if you got the lesson.

Herbert Evison: I did.

Allen Altvater: Well, this snake episode…(chuckles)

Herbert Evison: Allen, while we had this turned off, for what reason I'm not sure, you told a good C.C.C. camp story which happens also to be a snake story about one of the foreman from the Myakka River State Park camp. I believe you said the foreman's name was Van Duyn (Van Dine) and if I remember rightly I met him at Myakka during the C.C.C. days and I watched him take a Diamondback rattler out of a big lard pail. He lifted it out with a stick and a loop and then he forced it into a very small packing case. Forced it in tail first and I remember him as a very big, powerful man with one-rather slightly crippled hand, but I can still see him forcing that snake

in there and it was a big Diamondback and the beads of sweat standing out on his forehead as he forced that snake back into this packing box which had a sliding top with some openings in it when he finally got the head in and the loop off the head, sliding the top up on there. That was for shipment to some snake farm where they used the venom.

Allen Altvater: Oh, yeah.

Herbert Evison: Now you say this man's name was Van Duyn. You might get on the record here the little incident of what he did at your training school.

Allen Altvater: Well, of course, since a great part of our work centered around teaching these young men, it was necessary that we be instructed in how to teach. So a good teacher was brought in and I believe all the superintendents and some of the foremen from all of the camps in the state were assembled here and this teacher taught this famous four-step method.

Herbert Evison: Yeah.

Allen Altvater: And the four-step method, of course, was to get their attention first then to demonstrate your project, then to describe it thoroughly, and the fourth step of course was to repeat the performance or have somebody from the class go back over it to be certain that you demonstrated so thoroughly that your student understood it and make certain that every detail was covered. Each of us had to choose a project. The one that I had, of course, was the one that you mentioned. It was blown fuses and how to extinguish fires, electrical fires particularly.

Allen Altvater: Well Myakka River was famous for its snakes; this naturalist, by the name of Van Duyn, was a foreman over there at the time. He chose this wildlife program; and he explained that the purpose of his talk was to prove that wildlife would not be afraid of man if he made no sudden movements or was not rough with the animal or the subject and if he was very careful with it, and to prove that point he explained that in the croaker sack that he held was a small non-poisonous snake, entirely harmless, but that since he came over in a pick-up it was necessary to put a lot of Spanish moss in this bag to protect the snake so it wouldn’t get shook up and wouldn’t get roughed up in anyway.

Allen Altvater: And so he stood before the class and put his arm down into the croaker sack and felt all around in there. You could see him searching for this snake in this Spanish moss. He finally brought it out - a little fella about, oh, I’d say 18 inches or two feet long; a little gray colored affair. And he very carefully brought him out of the bag and very gently laid him down on the floor and very carefully shuffled back away from him so there was no sudden movement of any kind and the snake lay there perfectly still. He

was alive all right, but he just lay there perfectly still. Nobody else made any movement, so then he shuffled back up to it again and very carefully reached down, picked him up by the back of the neck, and put him back in the croaker sack.

Allen Altvater: He'd made a demonstration that the snake wouldn't run nor it wouldn't be afraid. No movements or no roughness was perpetrated. So, of course, that finished his part of it and the next thing, of course, was to get somebody from the audience to repeat the performance. Everybody with the exception of Lowery from Marianna sat there like stone Indians. Nobody was about to volunteer except this fella Lowery, whom we all considered to be a loudmouth. He spoke up he'd do it, so he went through the same preliminary talk as Van Duyn about being careful and not to rub 'em up and be gentle with 'em and not startle 'em; and he went through the same preliminary talk about the Spanish moss; and in the meantime he was putting his arm down into the croaker sack to feel around in the moss and there he froze. He was just like he was petrified. So he finally got mobile again and pulled out this other snake that was in that Spanish moss. It was probably four feet long at least and as big around as your arm or actually as big as the calf of your leg. It was a blue Indigo, perfectly harmless, but at the same time I wouldn't want to run on to it in the Spanish moss. That's for sure.

Allen Altvater: That was one of the better demonstrations of the school, but school was entirely successful. It did give us some insight on how to put across the points that we wanted to make in the school.

Herbert Evison: Allan looking back on that C.C.C. period, do you think of any other. Now that was a good incident, - the kind of thing that I had wanted to get on these tapes. Do you think of any others of interest that we ought to record?

Allen Altvater: When I first went up to Oldtown we had a captain in the Army there who was kind of a dandy and he had his belt and his war spurs and carried his little swagger stick. The officers mess was down one side of the room and the supervisory personnel down the other side of the room and he came in the mess with those spurs and the belt and the swagger stick. There was kind of a little rivalry between the two messes, you know, so we had a foreman who was kind of a lil' wag anyway and so one day he came in and he had a pair of lineman's spurs on and a lineman's belt and a machete. He was going to top the captain, but by and large the Army and the supervisory personnel got along very well together.

Herbert Evison: Yeah. You didn't feel then, I judge, that they kept an unduly large number of men out for the housekeeping chores?

Allen Altvater: Never did in my camps. I never had any trouble that way. The only trouble I had was with the first man who was the captain up there at Oldtown. He was due to go out shortly after I came in – within a day or two as a matter of fact.

Herbert Evison: Yeah.

Allen Altvater: I replaced a man by the name of Clover who apparently was a political appointee and he was one of these that were weeded out....

Herbert Evison: Yeah, yeah.

Allen Altvater: In this process of which I spoke. Right in the early part there they weeded 'em out pretty fast and replaced 'em pretty fast. Mr. Clover apparently had problems of all kinds and among ‘em I gathered later that his inventory was kind of at fault if you know what I mean. Anyway I went in there on July the 5th, if I'm not mistaken, and on July the 6th we took inventory of his property. Found everything in good condition. He had every item that he could possibly want that was on the inventory and so I signed for it. Then about a month or so later a man came from Tallahassee, a major - I forget his last name now, - anyway he came down to check my inventory. Lord, I was one item after another short – axes, pliers, tarpaulins, any number of things sort – so I got my amount of ribbing from him and I was at a loss to know what to do, so I called the men all up including the storekeepers and my little storekeeper said: “I can explain that all to you very well, if you want to know about it.” Captain Clover and the captain of the Army end of the thing were very good friends; and he said what Captain Clover was short he borrowed from the Army long enough to complete his inventory then they were returned to the Army. So I got a whole new inventory after that. It was fortunate the young man was willing to testify to that to this major who had come down to check me in, but we never had any problems with the Army personnel in anyway. It was very amiable every activity we ever had.

Herbert Evison: Before we end this up, we have quite a little tape here, but I would like to get on here something of your later experiences. With the folding of the C.C.C. you went into the Seabees and where all did you serve?

Allen Altvater: Well, my major area of activity was on Munda and we went in there with the invasion, I mean with the assault crews and took over the airfield and air strip there. As we went in we had one of those exciting experiences. One end of it was under siege, or under fire, and the other end was where we went in.

Herbert Evison: Yeah. Was your job the maintenance of the air strip?

Allen Altvater: No sir. Only in a way. I had all the heavy equipment operations, the bulldozers, and the road patrols, and the dipper sticks or buckets you might call 'em and draglines and that type of thing.

Herbert Evison: Yeah. Well what was your chore on there? Were you just the maintenance of that area?

Allen Altvater: Yes, sir.

Herbert Evison: I see.

Allen Altvater: And building, - well, of course, the air strip was completely rebuilt. It was widened. When we went in it was possibly 40 feet or 50 feet wide.

Herbert Evison: Yeah.

Allen Altvater: Well we made it about 300 feet wide and then lengthened it out to about a mile and a half, or two miles, and then built a lot of roads around there. Our commander was island commander and he had charge of all the equipment and all of the various engineering units on the entire island. It was a very interesting job. Worked around the clock twenty four hours a day.

Herbert Evison: Yeah, but how long were you in there? During most of your period of service?

Allen Altvater: Oh, yes, entirely.

Herbert Evison: Ah, yes.

Allen Altvater: Being as old as I was, they got rid of me as fast as they could. I was only there nine, ten months, you see. (laughs)

Herbert Evison: Well, then, did you leave the Seabees?

Allen Altvater: Well, came back to the states. We went through a good part of Guadalcanal and then moved on up to Munda. Of course they had a lot of nice experiences there.

Herbert Evison: Yes, I can believe that.

Allen Altvater: A lot of very pleasant experiences and I made a lot of friends and I enjoyed every minute of it.

Herbert Evison: Well now you got out of the Seabees in ‘44, that's 25 years ago. What have you done principally since then?

Allen Altvater: Well, I went back to work here with the city. See, the Army abandoned this airport out here and we saw it as a possible or potential site for industry.

Herbert Evison: Yeah.

Allen Altvater: And the city needed a good airport; and so we took the airport over and stayed there for 13 years and they built a pretty nice....

Herbert Evison: Yeah, now you were manager of the airport?

Allen Altvater: Little operation. Yes, sir. And it wasn't a very popular idea to begin with, but it's gotten to be now a pretty good proposition.

Herbert Evison: Now is it used mostly by private fliers?

Allen Altvater: Yes, sir, entirely. We don't have any scheduled operations of any kind. There isn't population enough to support that, you see, in the central part here. But it's one of those things that will be here and it'll be ready when the demand calls.

Herbert Evison: Yes. When and if needed, huh?

Allen Altvater: When and if needed, yes.

Herbert Evison: Well, now, you say you had that job for 13 years. I know you're working for the State Department of Agriculture now. Did you go from that to your present job?

Allen Altvater: Yes, sir.

Herbert Evison: And just what is your state job?

Allen Altvater: Well, I'm in charge of the maintenance division for the Department of Agriculture of the State of Florida. We have automotive equipment all the way from Miami to Pensacola, scattered all over the state. We bring vehicles in to Sebring here for major overhaul and then we have travelling crews that go into the field and do the minor operations on cars to keep 'em in good operating condition. Then we maintain buildings, too, and build structures for the Department of Agriculture. Right now we've got an expansion program on a laboratory down in Miami. We just finished one in Live Oak and we just did a little job in Pensacola last month and...

Herbert Evison: For heaven's sakes.

Allen Altvater: So we have pretty big territory.

Herbert Evison: Yeah, well, considering the size of your territory, I'm glad we found you at home base at this particular time.

Allen Altvater: Well, I had next week to spend in Tallahassee. And, of course, that's what makes it interesting. It's so diversified.

Herbert Evison: Well, now, I don't remember just what you said was your birth date, but I think you're past seventy. When do you figure you're going to retire, if ever?

Allen Altvater: (laughs) Well, I don't know. My health is good.

Herbert Evison: Looks it.

Allen Altvater: I may lack the brain power to do it, but I've got the physical ability, I think, to carry on all the work assigned to me. And the boss seems happy, up to now.

Herbert Evison: Yeah. I take it that you have no immediate thoughts of quitting.

Allen Altvater: Not in the least. (laughs)

Herbert Evison: I'll tell you, it's wonderful to have a job that you still find interesting; and apparently that's the case with you.

Allen Altvater: I'd never had a job that wasn't interesting. I've never had a job that I've been qualified fully to fill, but then, at least it offers a challenge. To each one.

Herbert Evison: Well, Allen, this has been a wonderful kind of chinning, both on and off tape, and I'm glad that you have a job that is sufficiently flexible so that you can stay away from it this way for such a recording as we made this morning. I'm delighted with what I've gotten from you. Thank you very much.

Allen Altvater: (chuckling) I've enjoyed it more than you have. Let me go up and get those pictures and show you what you can use.

Herbert Evison: Yeah, wonderful.

Allen Altvater: All right.

END OF TAPE