

Homer Bunker
Zion National Park Oral History Project
CCC Reunion
September 28, 1989

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[Note: the tape for this interview and later the disk was damaged and it was very difficult to hear the entire interview. The transcription has been done to the best of our ability.]

Jeff Frank: Well first of all I would like to welcome you down to the park and down to the reunion and we hope that you enjoy yourself while you are here. Dealing with the idea of the CCC presentation, oral history that we are working on now the idea of the project is to kind of glean from your memory and the memorabilia you might bring with you, information about what happened here, when it happened, what you did, your experiences good and bad and just general ideas to see what's around. As I understand that many of the records are being kept by the companies down here have just got misplaced or lost. They are not totally sure about where they are. So by asking a couple questions and maybe listening to some of the stories that you might have heard about your experiences here, we can get a little better idea as to what took place with the CCC and if you bear with me we will go through and pick out a few important questions and then we will kind of go off on the stories after that and find out about your own experiences.

Homer Bunker: Yeah, so a few of my experiences.

Jeff Frank: First of all you mentioned that when you came now to the area; you are living now in what area?

Homer Bunker: Huntsville, Utah. That is near Ogden.

Jeff Frank: Okay. Before when you were a member of the CCCs, were you a native to Utah? From Utah or one of the surrounding areas?

Homer Bunker: A part of Utah

Jeff Frank: How did you find out about the CCC program?

Homer Bunker: One of my friends, I guess dared me, and he said. "Let's go sign up for the CCCs."

Jeff Frank: And that friend's name was?

Homer Bunker: Que Hislop

Jeff Frank: And do you know how to spell that?

Homer Bunker: Q-U-E

Frank: Okay

Bunker: H-I-S-L-O-P

Frank: Can you spell that last name again please?

Bunker: H-I- S-L-O-P

Frank: And with that dare, when you came down here, what were your kinds of expectations to what the CCC program was going to be? What did you expect to find?

Bunker: I didn't have any idea. That was during tough times during the Depression and I did have a job. I was driving a truck for a person at that time. I did come down with him to Ogden and we signed up and I got to go and he did not.

Frank: You got into the program and he stayed at home.

Bunker: Well he just didn't get chosen. He didn't get chosen soon enough. There were more there than the number or the quota.

Frank: What size quota was that at that time?

Bunker: I can't remember, but it was probably one hundred, plus or minus.

Frank: When you arrived here to camp, did you came down in one large group in trucks or were there a numerous amount of trucks coming in from other areas and they kind of gathered here?

Bunker: We came together right from the Ogden area and those trucks stayed together and brought us right here.

Frank: Were there other men in the camp?

Bunker: There were a few here from the Nephi area or around there.

Frank: With the fact that they were bringing people from a variety of areas, were there any problems when you arrived as to each group picking up its own little territory or domain? Some people were left as outsiders. Some were more accepted than others.

Bunker: It started out that way just very slightly. It became clannish. A group from here and a group from here that knew each other but that soon faded away.

Frank: So most of the original breakdowns were just friends on friends and not town for town? And after you guys had got about ten to twelve hours of work each day you became to be all friends.

Bunker: I think we were all really friends.

Frank: What was the average workday, from when to when?

Bunker: We would work Monday through Friday.

Frank: Time in the morning to night or during dusk.

Bunker: Usually eight, eight in the morning until the time we would leave work, around eight o'clock time until four thirty or five o'clock.

Frank: Basically it was their own regimented program, where they were ready in the morning and got up at a certain time, you got a certain time for meals, and lights out about ten o'clock, something like that? Did they strictly enforce that?

Bunker: You had the possibility of having leave, having special leave for a longer period of time or maybe even for over a weekend, but normally it was bed check at such and such a time.

Frank: What was the penalty for someone, say, missing bed check?

Bunker: That's me, I got caught.

Frank: You got caught now, okay I will ask you.

Bunker: I got caught three times. I was supposed to have got caught and they said I was AWOL one time.

Frank: So they were pretty strict about where you were supposed to be and when you were supposed to be there.

Bunker: Yes, they would check us out. We had key rings in, spaces on a board and they would take your key ring off and put it in a box. When you came back, you put your ring back on so they could tell when you were there and when you were not.

Frank: You say it happened to you three times that you were caught or?

Bunker: I was caught every time.

Frank: Did they take any different action against you. I know in the military today if you make a virtuous mistake, they give you special duties like KP or something like that.

Bunker: They took leave away one time and then another time I was confined, and the third time you were supposed to be kicked out of camp. They had a Kangaroo Court. There were two of them and they had a Kangaroo Court for us and I swear to you I was innocent. I was not AWOL. Then we had the Kangaroo Court. Captain Kennedy was the judge and he asked me what I felt about it. And I said, "If this is what I have to live through, then

kick me out.” I would lose money and so we sat down and had a little talk. But the plan all worked out and we found out why this was done by a person personally to me.

Frank: So they moved your key ring even though you were there?

Bunker: Yes he did.

Frank: So you did have some characters in camp? I take it.

Bunker: There were animosity feelings, over probably accomplishments or maybe special privileges or whatever you might call them.

Frank: So you say that it was more of a personal dislike between the two or just the point of mischief, or just playing a friendly joke. Well there is probably. I know I was in the military and all the groups there was always one person in camp, some people would call them the camp cut up, the camp clown, the clown character, whose whole intent after duty hours was to make life interesting for others. Was there one particular person, say, in your company or your group that kind of kept things lively? You never knew what to expect the next time that they showed up?

Bunker: Well I thought there were two or three probably who did, who had special talents and that had things done to them more than anyone else.

Frank: Well was there anyone, say, in the company that if you turned your back on them or you went and did something, you could always expect that somebody to play a practical joker?

Bunker: Oh yes.

Frank: Could you maybe relay one experience that you probably had with someone like that?

Bunker: He was a lot bigger than I was, and I was coming in from the shower one time and of course in times like that you have to run around naked, you just come into the shower naked and he caught me with a wet towel. He was about to come near me and so I tried to take his towel.

(Laughs)

Bunker: I didn't lose, but I didn't win very much.

Frank: Kind of had a no win situation.

Bunker: Right, right.

Frank: How long were you in the CCC's?

Bunker: Eight months.

Frank: And you spent your whole time here at Zion's Camp, or other areas?

Bunker: No, here. We went other places to work. I usually transported people where they went.

Frank: So you were a driver, mainly? Did you do any other project work like working with different equipment or driving?

Bunker: Yes I ran a drag line, and I had a tractor and some of these things they used in the quarry. They didn't use those all the time, but when they did I would run them.

Frank: While you were here in Zion I know that sometimes you would get groups together in camp and that's as far as the friendship would go or that's as far as the associations go. Was there an encouragement by the commanding officer or maybe the platoon squad, or company leader, to actually take part in activities like in Springdale or local communities?

Bunker: Yes.

Frank: You know to become friendly with them, get involved with their program.

Bunker: Yes.

Frank: I know people build walls normally to keep them separate.

Bunker: No, because we attended church. I attended church for example in Springdale. So we became involved with people there. I also was a member of a quartet, a singing quartet and we were getting involved in programs such as PTA programs and some school programs and such things that occur in Toquerville and some of the outlying places. And we were invited to a lot of places a number of places for various types of entertainment and programs.

Frank: Okay while you were in the community, did people in some way set you apart in a way that you were a group from the Park and you became a separate entity or were you just accepted by the communities?

Bunker: I thought they just accepted us as we were, just like full time friends I made. We had one exception to that and that would be in Toquerville. There was only a group of young guys about our age who were not too crazy about the attitudes that people had towards them. But for the most part everyone treated us tremendously.

Frank: Although you were only here for an eight month period, did you kind of foster some friendships that have lasted for a lifetime? Do you have people down here that you come back and visit or somebody you know?

Bunker: Yeah. I would like to find some of the people now. We could talk to that somebody, if for example, and I thought of that driving up this way, if a person was fifteen years old at that time they would now be seventy years old, maybe not likely even living. Some of the girls here in Springdale, I saw some pictures that one of the guys has of them, and there were three girls and we went to church programs and church parties with them and we really enjoyed that.

Frank: Was your wife one of the girls from the area here or was she from somewhere up in northern Utah?

Bunker: No. She is from Salt Lake.

Frank: Salt Lake? You had the opportunity to meet all the girls here, but you had one at home that was waiting for you.

Bunker: No I wasn't sure at that time. I hadn't met her but I had met with a girl that was writing to her at that time, but I don't think it was anything serious. The girls here were really not the girls you fell in love with. The girls that I associated with here, they were just great friends, they were just good friends, people you wanted to be with. I would go to their home and maybe sit and eat popcorn and you didn't watch television because you didn't have television, but I remember sitting by a fireplace, eating popcorn, maybe just talking about things in groups maybe about four or five of us together.

Frank: You mentioned the fact that you had one group of young men in Toquerville though that had a different attitude towards you. Could that have been probably because of the fact that you were a competition to young girls nearby?

Bunker: Exactly right and they didn't like that. I guess maybe we overplayed it too. It probably was a lot of our fault. I drove the truck down. We all went down and the person that we called a chaperon, the person that was in charge of our activities, he was pretty excited about getting us all back in the truck.

Frank: Who won?

Bunker: I don't think it was a win or lose situation.

Frank: While you were here in the camp, you were organized into companies in Zion. How was it organized; how was it broke down?

Bunker: Not very much, there wasn't very much breakdown of any kind. One barracks was considered the camp's overhead and all of us that had anything to do with the supervision or the operation of maintenance of the operation of any type were probably considered camp overhead. Other than that I believe we had five barracks, I think I was in barracks

five and that was the head barracks and that would take in the cooks and the spike sergeants and truck drivers and operators and some of those people.

Frank: Okay, with the army being the overseer of the camp in many cases today's organizations they have like company A and company B and so forth. How did they determine where you were and what you were doing and how to keep track of all the people? Did they assign you all like a barracks number?

Bunker: You had a barracks number and you had a barrack leader. There was a barracks leader to each barrack and we were in charge of the barrack. We were to know of the people in that barrack.

Frank: It was your responsibility to keep tabs on wherever they went and whatever they were doing, to some extent.

Bunker: Well, being on leave then, it would be the person in the office and that was where you would have to check out from and return to.

Frank: How much leave do you actually earn while working with the CCC? Was it based on how many days you were here?

Bunker: I don't think I ever knew of any time that it was necessary to go anyplace that we couldn't go. Mind you, this may be hard maybe for you to understand because we had no place to go. And there was no way to get there. The only way we could go, there was no transportation, absolutely no transportation that we had unless we did it through the office of the camp, and then we would have to be taken there by someone with a government vehicle.

Frank: So if you had to go back home, say up to the Salt Lake area, you would have to go work it out with the camp office to get transported to a train depot to Cedar to get to Salt Lake.

Bunker: If that were to happen for a group to go, there would have to be people. We had Bishop Bradshaw and I think he was from Toquerville, and he would supply trucks that would take us to some of the places where they needed to go. But a lot of places for entertainment or for sports or for any particular reason that we needed to go anyplace, then we would use our vehicles from camp. We would haul stuff over, and you were assigned people that were to ride with you.

Frank: Inside the camp, was it much like a small city with all the conveniences you needed? Like one building was your mess hall, one building was the barracks, and maybe you had a hospital. Was there a theater of any kind or recreational facility, or things like that?

Bunker: We had what we called a recreation room and there was for a long time nothing in it. There was a pool table in there, but not even a pool ball on the table.

Frank: Did they have like a basketball court or anything outside?

Bunker: Not when we came here. We had nothing because this was a new camp and we didn't have anything. It caused a lot of resentment among the personnel because as a new camp we didn't have the facilities; we didn't have the food supplies, the cooking equipment, the experience. We had nothing in the way of recreation facilities. We had no clothing. We had no clothing issued. I came down here in a suit and I wore that suit I believe for two weeks. I didn't have anything to work in. It was a hard camp, a hard deal to start out with, but it did turn out. You couldn't put together a better camp than we had.

Frank: Like it kind of grew together with the camp?

Bunker: It was because of the leadership that we had and because of the type and cliental, the type of people that were in the camp. You couldn't have anything better. Our food and the facility, became tremendously good, everything about the camp. We had sports. I was privileged to go with the captain to Cedar City to pick out recreational equipment and you now sporting equipment. Let's see, baseball, basketball and tennis and softball and horse shoes and all of that. After that period of time, then everything worked so well.

Frank: It was just getting that initial starting going. Everything was still rough and it was kind of more of a very bare rugged camp. You came here and all you did was work and there wasn't any kind of relief.

Bunker: There wasn't anything to do. There was no color. There was no color, it was all dull.

Frank: Did the local people during this transition period from your arrival to when the camp became self-sufficient offer any avenue for recreation?

Bunker: I don't think they even recognized we were here. Because you see this camp hadn't been occupied, it was only temporarily occupied at the time we got it.

Frank: So you were one of the first groups in then?

Bunker: They had a temporary group, as I understood before we were there. We were the first group that was in the NP-2. And then the other camp across the river, what we called the Bryce Camp, they came in from Bryce during the cold winter months. And there another thing, camp on either side of the river and the atmosphere was tremendous.

Frank: It was interchanged between the two?

Bunker: I thought it was. There might have been some discrepancies and those things but not to my knowledge. I have never known, I thought it was just excellent.

Frank: When you were here you were always assigned to one camp or were you assigned to spike camps around the area?

Bunker: No, I was assigned to one camp.

Frank: And most of the products you were involved with, you stayed here in the county or out to Bryce or did you move around quite a bit?

Bunker: We didn't move anyplace other than here. All of our work was concentrated in the farthest I think we went from here is up on the top up there by the East entrance.

Frank: Would that be outside of the tunnel?

Bunker: Yes and we went up and I hauled some cedar posts out there; they took a group up there to cut cedar posts and we brought those down.

Frank: They were used for what? Where were the cedar posts supposed to be used?

Bunker: Some of them they were using them for the areas where they were putting in cribbing to stabilize some of those that fell on the ground and they were using some for fence markers or station markers. I don't remember of any fence of any kind being built.

Frank: So they weren't being used as a boundary fence?

Bunker: No I don't think so.

Frank: Here in the camp with all of these people around and that the fact that there was so much potential around the rock falls and slopes, were there any serious injuries in the group?

Bunker: I don't remember any anytime. People would get a finger mashed or something like that working in the quarry or probably working up where we were putting in the cribbing and some of those things, but you know I don't, I don't ever remember any serious accident.

Frank: No broken legs or arms, things like that?

Bunker: No, I don't ever remember of any.

Frank: With the fights with broken noses and bruises and that's all you had things like that.

Bunker: And they were very few; very, very few. And most of that was done in the fun. Like I said, after we had gone and got some recreation equipment and boxing gloves and things like that, you know. If someone got acting up too much, we would put him in the ring. There was one guy, we would put him in the ring with him and he would straighten him out.

Frank: You mean horizontally? I know in most areas when you get anyone together there are always stories that are generated, some of these stories someone has embellished over the years to make them sound more interesting. Is there any one particular story that when

you get together with friends that you like to tell them about your experience down here or that might relate to something that happened down here that you are very proud of?

Bunker: No. I think probably the trip down here would have the most interest as far as any story because it was a nightmare. They loaded us on a truck at noon one day. I had no idea that I was going to go to the CCC camp when I left home. Mother took me to town, I had a suit on and they had told us to dress. They had all the people they were going to have. Then they said that we need two more. There were two that didn't pass the physical or something. They took two more and so we were dressing and they came back out and said that we need one more, one of those didn't pass. And I was the next one and that's how come I got to go and my friend didn't get to go, but he did go later.

Frank: So you came all the way down in a truck?

Bunker: Yes, they loaded us in the back of an open truck at noon and we got down here about noon or a little earlier than that the next day and that was how long.

Frank: So you drove all night long, basically?

Bunker: Yeah it was a long, long time.

Frank: Sounds like it would be.

The work that you did as a member of the CCC battalion group when you were down here, has this been something that you have taken and extended it on to a career through the years or have you just used the experience, the hard work and a camaraderie as something to kind of base your life on?

Bunker: Well, the last you stated is probably the most important I think in any way. I think, yes it taught us the concept of if you want something you have to work for it. I don't know anyone that got too much here that didn't somehow have to earn, and they did get paid what they earned. When I say they paid, it doesn't necessarily mean dollars and cents, but it did a lot for us in life. I think the program was here and the way it was operated, I wouldn't trade it for any other part in my life, any other learning part in my life. Shortly after the time that I was down here I went on, stayed on in the same thing. Within a matter of a few years, I was a district maintenance superintendent for the highway department in the seven northern counties of Utah and I was there for fifteen years and then I left there and worked the next thirty years as a construction superintendent. So I stayed pretty much in the same type work as I did here.

Frank: So do you feel that what happened here would definitely be beneficial to you?

Bunker: Definitely.

Frank: Do you think it was beneficial to the country as a whole? Some people stayed at the CCC with nothing more than a 'give me' program. Do you think the idea of the CCC was conceived and carried out in an effective manner which everybody benefitted from? Both individual and nation alike?

Bunker: I couldn't agree with your first statement at all. I couldn't see anything other than an opportunity to come here and for many a place to earn a little bit that they were not able to earn before, and also to learn what it was like to earn and then the learning ability that you would have for getting along with people and being able to put your efforts in with someone else. No, I think it was one of the finest things at that time that has ever happened to the young people. Our young people today could benefit very much I believe from that same type thing if they would accept it.

Frank: Many of the people you met during your experience at the CCC, have you kept in contact with a few or is this reunion here in Zion the first contact you have had with many of them for a long time?

Bunker: I see them occasionally, some of them, though not very many. I think there are eight of us here from our group that are here today. There are two still living in the same town I live in who were here. Neither of them came down; neither was able to. One person who is here, we are both involved in Farm Bureau. He is involved in Farm Bureau and I am the President of Farm Bureau in the Ogden Valley area. And so in those type things we are in contact, but as far as personal things, social relationships and things like that, I don't think so. They are all still in my memory as they were then and you don't see them change very much from that today.

Frank: Do you feel like these reunions like this would be beneficial with the fact that not only the opportunity we have with doing the oral histories and getting the historical memorabilia like photographs and journals, but also it would be a good chance for people to reminisce and as some people say, "live in the past of the good ole' days."

Bunker: If the park service provides any benefit out of this at all, it would I think be only a drop in the bucket to the benefit that it would be to us who were here and were able to get back together in the same place and talk about the same things that we did then and get to see the same people we knew then and talk about our lives. We haven't talked about our lives that much, but the association again, I think is far more important even than whatever benefits the Park Service might get.

Frank: The program that we are trying to do with oral histories would be one that we will gather as much information about the program as possible. We would gather as much photographic documentation as we can and as well as journals and anything else that the individuals would come to the reunions had. This information will be shared on a national basis and hopefully that information we compile would give a clear picture and

one analogy that I use for people, when someone says, “I don’t have much to tell” I say they are the ones with a part of the puzzle, every piece has a place and all the pieces we are trying to put together, we have a picture. We have holes right now and these interviews and everything we are doing now is a means of filling in some of these holes. We appreciate the fact that people have taken the time to come down. We hope that they enjoyed the experience and we hope to make this somewhat of an annual event as possible, if not here maybe in Bryce or some other location nearby where the different groups can gather.

End of interview.