

Les Deans
Zion National Park Oral History Project
CCC Reunion
September 29, 1989

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Don Durrett: Okay, this is Don Durrett and I'm interviewing Les [Leslie] Deans. We're the Nature Center here at Zion National Park. It's September 29th, 1989, and it's about 4:15. With that Les why don't you just tell us where you're from and how it was you got started in the CCCs and then we'll just ask you as we go along if there's something I'm not clear on.

Les Deans: Okay Don. I was in high school there in Salt Lake, South High School which has been deleted because of low population around there. I knew there wasn't much work around so I happened to get a hold of a fellow that was in the Chamber of Commerce and he suggested they was gonna have a CC camp. So I said, "Well put me down. How do I get in?" He says, "Well, your folks have to be kind of on relief and having welfare such as that, but we'll see what we can do." Well, I, finally I got a call saying that I'd been accepted and I was to report to Fort Douglas for a physical and interview. So to Fort Douglas I went in the last week of May, last week of May.

Don Durrett: Of '33?

Les Deans: 1933. I left Fort Douglas. They hauled us down, put us in a chair car at the Union Pacific depot, hooked it on behind a darn freight train and took us to Lund. We wasn't told were we was going. We didn't know.

Don Durrett: Didn't know. Let's back up just a second. Were you through high school? Had you graduated?

Les Deans: I just got out of high school.

Don Durrett: You just got out of high school when you got in?

Les Deans: I just got out of high school, yes.

Don Durrett: Okay. Seventeen?

Les Deans: About that.

Don Durrett: Okay go ahead.

Deans: Anyhow, we waited around there at Lund for quite a while and then here comes the switch engine that takes the cars over to Cedar City, and we was hooked on to that and we went to Cedar. There at Cedar they gave us a cheese sandwich and it was Army bread and thick cheese. It was dry as a board. The park service had a bunch of old trucks and old cars and we piled into that and we went up to Blue Springs up where Kolob is.

Durrett: Um-hm.

Deans: And we didn't come down to Virgin to go up there. We went up from Cedar.

Durrett: Oh out over that.

Deans: And then across, and there was still snow up there.

Durrett: Kind of a rough old long haul up that too.

Deans: And we had to move trees; we had to move rocks and all to get around 'em.

Durrett: Yes.

Deans: And some of those switch backs, those old trucks we had to push 'em. It was rough, but 'course there was only about thirty of us, about all there was. When we got up there why they went over, and I think it was Doctor Thorley's property, but it was just a little bit from where the lake is now up there, the reservoir. Anyhow, we lined up and they numbered us off and every five guys they gave a tent. I was so tired and the guy that happened to get number five, he was in charge. I happened to get number five. So it would be one, two, three, four, five, and then one, two--

Durrett: Then you had to set the tent up and everything then.

Deans: Yes. And so I said to them, I says, "I'm so tired I don't feel like setting a tent up. Why don't we just lay it out, put our blankets on there, pull part of our tent over some, call it quits for the day. So we did. (Laughs). We didn't put a tent up. The next morning we got up we had to put up our tent.

Durrett: Sure.

Deans: We didn't know what we was gonna do, and they issued us a pair of shoes, a pair of pants, and a shirt and said that we would get other stuff later, which we did.

They took us out there. We was supposed to build a road to get out to the edge of the canyon there and put a telephone line down, a fire hazard I guess. Anyhow, I went out on a rock gang there drilling holes so we could blast the rock to build this road. I got hit right here on that knuckle, and I still got the scar, with a sledge hammer. I was holding the bit.

Durrett: Hand drilling, huh?

Deans: Oh yes! We didn't have no compressors.

Durrett: Sure.

Deans: And the guy missed a little bit and he got me. Well, that didn't look so good to me and I didn't think that was very good. I thought, boy I don't know what I got into. So anyhow we got back into camp that night, and a guy, first aid, he bandaged it up, come out all right. But then it wasn't too long after that there we had an army cook from Fort Douglas that came down with us and he was supposed to go back to Fort Douglas, but he's got to get a cook. So they put a sign on the bulletin board. We'll give you six dollars more if you'll be the cook. I thought six dollars, well.

Durrett: Thirty-six dollars then was what you'd make?

Deans: So I applied and got it.

Durrett: Yah!

Deans: I wasn't too, too dumb at it. I'd done a lot of cooking like that in scout work and like that there. So I wrote to Calumet Baking Powders and told them where I was and what I was interested in. They sent me a whole box of recipes of different menus, and on the back they would have so much for five, ten, fifteen, twenty. So all I had to do was add together to know how much to put on. So that there worked out slick, and so I stayed in the kitchen the whole time.

Durrett: Were you just in six months? Were you a year? What?

Deans: No. I stayed till the middle of August '34.

Durrett: So you were in over a year?

Deans: Oh yeh.

Durrett: Over the six months then.

Deans: When I went out, I was in a spike camp in Cedar Breaks.

Durrett: Um-hm.

Deans: Made camp and come on from here over to Bryce.

Durrett: Um-hm.

Deans: Of course I had to go over to Bryce to have a physical to get out and like that there. I spent most of my time down here in Zion.

Durrett: Um-hm.

Deans: I was down here before Brothers got here.

Durrett: Yes. So were you in the camp over on this side of the river then?

Deans: Yes, nine sixty-two.

Durrett: Yes.

Deans: We had a Lieutenant Frank who was the Army officer in charge here, and when Brothers come in, Brothers worked under him.

Durrett: Before we go on, let me backtrack just a little bit. How long were you up at Blue Springs? Surely you didn't spend the winter up there.

Deans: Oh, heavens no! We spent it down here.

Durrett: Yes.

Deans: We would come down about this time of year.

Durrett: Uh-huh.

Deans: Just after the kids went to school.

Durrett: Yes.

Deans: And then we'd be here all winter.

Durrett: Yes.

Deans: And it was beautiful down here in the winter. Shucks!

Durrett: But you actually started cooking while you were up at the camp.

Deans: Yes.

Durrett: What kind of food did you have up there on the mountain? Was that tough to get in and out and everything? Did they bring the food up to you in a truck?

Deans: We had what we call a commissary truck. A guy named Sam Burrell drove it. He was just one of the guys.

Durrett: Um-hm.

Deans: And it was an Army truck, and he'd go to Cedar City every other day. But some days he was pretty late getting back. He had a little bit of a rough time getting back.

Durrett: Now did you tell him what you wanted him to bring back or did he bring back and then you had to cook with what he brought back?

Deans: No. He would bring back what we told him to get.

Durrett: I see.

Deans: They sent out of Fort Douglas. A convoy would leave Fort Douglas once a month, and different trucks in the convoy would be going to different camps, and they would have all of our supplies our canned goods and all like that there in that. We would order them ahead of time and then this convoy truck would come down once a month.

Durrett: And it'd come clear up to camp here would it?

Deans: Clear up to the camp.

Durrett: Yes.

Deans: Yes and the same thing happened when we got down here. Our camp got clear up to two hundred people down here. So we had more than one truck pull up here.

Durrett: Sure. But it was still just a once a month thing?

Deans: Once a month thing, but stuff like milk, bread and eggs, stuff like that there, we had permission to buy it down to Cedar City to the store.

Durrett: Uh-huh.

Deans: And we would do that, and then when we got down here if we had to have something special, Scholzen had that truck line out of Hurricane. Why we could notify him and he'd pick it up and bring it up for us.

Durrett: Sure.

Deans: 'Course I don't know what the government paid him.

Durrett: Yes.

Deans: We just figured pay wasn't nothing anyhow. (Laughs)

Durrett: Right, everybody was just trying to exist in those years.

Deans: But then after I'd been down here for a while I got promoted so I got forty-five dollars a month.

Durrett: Is that right. You were one of the forty-five men then, uh?

Deans: Boy, I had money!

Durrett: Now when you were at forty-five a month, how much did you keep and how much did they send home?

Deans: I kept ten dollars and the rest went home. My dad told me when I come, he says, "We'll put that money all in the bank for you." Well I guess they never found the bank cause I never got any of it. (Don laughs)

Durrett: Found out they needed it?

Deans: They needed it. But dad had a Model A Ford and he let me have that.

Durrett: Is that right?

Deans: Yes.

Durrett: Well that was putting money in the bank I guess.

Deans: And the last three months I had it in camp. I had my car down here.

Durrett: Oh yes. Couldn't bring it to camp could you?

Deans: No. I was at Cedar Breaks.

Durrett: Oh, and could you take it right up to camp?

Deans: I parked it right to the side of my tent. (Laughs)

Durrett: Is that right. All right.

Deans: But there were several of them had cars. Jake Johns, he had a car and he had it parked down there in Springdale. June Moody from St. George, he had a Ford parked down there in Springdale.

Durrett: Yes.

Deans: But I didn't have to worry about that down here because being a head cook, I could pretty much do what I wanted to. If I wanted a truck to go to town, I could go to Red Irwin and say, "Red, I need a truck."

Durrett: Yes.

Deans: And I could get away with it.

Durrett: Yes.

Deans: Just like Brothers when he seen me here yesterday. Why he remembered that prank. He said, "If you hadn't been one of the cooks, you'd of been on KP the rest of your time."
(Both laugh)

Durrett: Well, you told me that off the tape, but tell me about that little prank and what the reason was for it. I mean, how come?

Deans: Oh, we was always pulling little pranks.

Durrett: Well go ahead and tell how it happened.

Deans: We was always short sheeting guys and like that there.

Durrett: Sure.

Deans: But Brothers when he came, he was just a fresh lieutenant.

Durrett: Right.

Deans: This was his first assignment he ever had out of school. And he come down here and, he wore that field hat turned up in front and turned up in the back. I don't know why, and then most of the time he'd have a rain coat on, a real thin one, you know. And so he'd go through the barracks checking our bed rolls and like that there. We got talking about it. So the guys were always daring each other to do something and so somebody come up with, "Well why don't we take one of those water buckets and hang it above the door so when the lieutenant comes, he opens the door, the bucket dumps on him."

Durrett: Oh on him.

Deans: I says, "Fine." So my bed was the second bed from the door. So up there we went and I had it all hooked up there. Down to the other end we had another one and in the next barrack we had two more. He went through both barracks before he got so mad he quit.
(Laughs)

Durrett: Oh no. He must have been about drowned by the time he got done. (Laughs).

Deans: But Lieutenant Frank, which was the commanding officer, why he just got a big kick out of it too.

Durrett: Sure.

Deans: 'Course, I imagine these army guys when they can get something over on another guy why that's part of the entertainment.

Durrett: Sure.

Deans: Anyhow, it was fun and we didn't have any trouble. I was actually one of those that went up there on West Temple and stayed all night. (Laughs)

Durrett: Oh, you was one of the ones that got caught up there and you couldn't get down and they had to come get you, or you went up to help get 'em down?

Deans: No. I wasn't in that there particular group I don't think because I don't remember the guys. But anyhow we got up there, but we couldn't get down.

Durrett: You didn't have time to get down?

Deans: And I was afraid to try to come down in the dark.

Durrett: Oh boy, I bet.

Deans: So, the next morning we come down.

Durrett: Yes.

Deans: But when I was made the head cook I made it a little better for the guys. I'd let 'em work three days straight and then have three days off.

Durrett: Oh, your cooks, you mean that were working under you?

Deans: Yes, yes. And so, we had time to go over all these darn mountains and run all over.

Durrett: Well now, how did they normally work?

Deans: Every other day.

Durrett: Oh, every other day is how the cooks worked, huh? You had it pretty good then.

Deans: Because we would start about five thirty in the morning.

Durrett: That was the question I was gonna get to next. It seemed like everybody got up at six.

Deans: Yes

Durrett: Did you have to wake yourselves up or did the army get you out to go do your cooking?

Deans: We used to wake ourselves up and then at the last we had them build a special deal on the side of the mess hall, on the other side of the kitchen. The mess hall was like this and the kitchen went out like this, and then out here we had them build us a special deal. And six cooks had that room there.

Durrett: Oh I see, so you weren't bunking with the other guys, but first you must have?

Deans: Yes, when we was at Blue Springs why I had four other guys in with me. None of them was in the kitchen.

Durrett: How many cooks do you have up to Blue Springs? You say you had about thirty guys.

Deans: We had three.

Durrett: Three cooks up there? How many down here where you were cooking for two hundred?

Deans: We had about six.

Durrett: And how many of those would cook per meal say?

Deans: Well, you'd, you'd have about three to four, and then of course you had your KP's come in and they would peel all the potatoes and stuff like that. The cooks didn't have to do that. Then I had Bill Fullerton, an old fellow kind of from St. George and we had them add on to that kitchen and we had a bakery room and he did all the baking for us.

Durrett: Yes.

Deans: He even made our bread.

Durrett: Yes.

Deans: We had cakes and pies and when Dr. Root come around, you know, the physical doctor, M.D. and analyst he would say to the guys down here they really had it lucky because the other camps "don't have no pastry cook."

Durrett: Yes.

Deans: They don't have cakes and all like that there. I says, "Well, that's their problem.

Durrett: Yes.

Deans: I had kind of a time with him [the baker] though because he would drink the vanilla extract instead of putting it in the cake. (Laugh) But we got a long all right.

Durrett: Did okay, huh? How long were you here before they made you head cook?

Deans: I was down here about three months.

Durrett: Who determined that? Now would that be the army, Brothers, did he determine that or who decided?

Deans: No it was Frank.

Durrett: So it was the commanding officer then that decided you ought to be head cook. So basically you must not had a boss other than him then?

Deans: Basically, and the rangers from the park, they would come up there to eat.

Durrett: Yes.

Deans: I had a special table right at one end of the mess hall and that was for the rangers, and I'd have half a dozen rangers almost every meal up there to eat.

Durrett: Yes.

Deans: I didn't have to feed the rangers. But you know if you get a long with the guys and help them this way and that way, it's that much easier for you.

Durrett: It is for everybody, sure, sure.

Deans: We had a nice, well like a recreation hall in a way, you might call it. We had a player piano in there and a pool table in there, and we had a little commissary where the guy that was in charge of all the supplies and like that. He had all kinds of candy and stuff like that you could buy, canned pop and like that there. When beer came back, well most of the guys they left camp and run down to Springdale. They opened a bar down there, but I don't know, that didn't interest me.

Durrett: Uh-huh.

Deans: Then I got quite well acquainted down in town 'cause I met a girl down there and kind of liked her. So I'd go down town two or three times a week.

Durrett: Yes.

Deans: I married her on the fourteenth of August in '34.

Durrett: Is that right. And her name?

Deans: Laurel Gibson.

Durrett: She was a local Springdale girl?

Deans: No. Hurricane.

Durrett: I'm sorry, I mean Hurricane, yes.

Deans: Her mother was the librarian down there.

Durrett: Yes.

Deans: Her dad was the barber, and he never cut my hair.

Durrett: Yes.

Deans: (Laughs) We've been married, well let's see that was '34, and so, -----??

Durrett: Fifty-five?

Deans: Yes.

Durrett: Fifty-five years, that's quite a while.

Deans: We had our a few ups and downs.

Durrett: Oh, well.

Deans: If I'd a known, even after I got married I could have stayed in camp.

Durrett: Yes.

Deans: But I thought I could do better. So I'd go back to Salt Lake where I figured I was better known and I could do better. But if I had to do it over again I'd . . .

Durrett: --probably stayed right here?

Deans: I'd of stayed in camp.

Durrett: Yes.

Deans: Because we had a few fellows [who were married]. We had one fellow, his name was Sadler. His wife lived right here in Springdale, although he was from Magna, Utah.

Durrett: Um-hm.

Deans: And he was married when he joined and he had his wife living right here as well. And there was a few other ones that was married. I don't know whether you knew Fred Fagergren, one of the rangers down here?

Durrett: Well, I've see the name a lot, but no I never knew him.

Deans: Well, he was kind of on night duty most of that summer we was down there.

Durrett: Yes.

Deans: And I knew him before he come down here. He only lived two blocks from me.

Durrett: Is that right!

Deans: Yes! (Laughs) It's funny, you know, you go to some place like that and then someone shows up. Gosh sakes, I know you. I went to school with you, or else you lived just around the corner.

Durrett: Yes.

Deans: In fact, there was four fellows that lived in the same ward I did, and I didn't know they was in camp or registered for camp until we got on that train. I walked down and there they were. There was four of us.

Durrett: Huh?

Deans: It was really nice. We had one deal which was kind of experience for a few of us. Guy named Sweeny. He was from Sandy, Utah, and he took a pass and he went back home and he come back with an old REO Speed Wagon truck, single axle, or single wheel. We arranged to take a week and go up to Salt Lake. We went in that old REO Speed Wagon. Boy that was one of the roughest weeks I ever spent.

Durrett: I'll be darn.

Deans: That darn thing it didn't want to go part of the time; we had to push it, and we had tire trouble, but it was just another experience (Laughs).

Durrett: Sure, sure.

Deans: Had a lot of fun.

Durrett: Yeh, when you're young like that, you don't realize it . . . (Laughs)

Deans: I rode most of the way on that trip on the front fender of that truck.

Durrett: Is that right?

Deans: Yes.

Durrett: Let me ask you some details about the kitchen since so far you're the only cook I've talked to. Maybe you're the only one down here today, you know, so.

Deans: Well, there's one guy down here and he said he was a cook too, but I don't remember him, and he talks with a little accent where, you know, that would make me kind of remember him.

Durrett: Maybe he was here a little different time or something or other.

Deans: Well, he's got the same number as I got on mine.

Durrett: You just don't remember him.

Deans: I don't remember him and he mentioned some other guy and I don't remember him. I remember a McAllister, a Fossett, a Johnsma??, a Schauerhammer, a Fullerton, a Spigot, a Moody, and myself. I remember that many that was in the kitchen.

Durrett: Yes.

Deans: 'Course they didn't all stay in or come in the same length of time.

Durrett: Anyway, tell me about the facilities you had. Let's start up at Blue Springs. What did you have to cook with?

Deans: We had an old army fuel range, wood burner.

Durrett: So you had to cook with wood. 'Course up in the high country was probably okay.

Deans: We had to cook with wood here all the time.

Durrett: You cooked with wood here too. That was a little hot in the summer time wasn't it?

Deans: Oh gosh sakes, those pans would get so hot that you'd reach for a towel before you reached for the pan.

Durrett: Yes.

Deans: And up here I had a big blow snake somebody brought in and I kept it right by my back door.

Durrett: Right.

Deans: I never had any flies.

Durrett: (laughs) I'll be darn.

Deans: Yes.

Durrett: But you had wood burning stoves here that you cooked on.

Deans: Yes. We had four stoves. One of them was put in this one room for the baker. And I don't know whether you know what a field range stove is or not.

Durrett: Yes.

Deans: It's like flat like that and it goes along there, then it turns along there, and then it kind of comes back here.

Durrett: Uh-huh.

Deans: Well see, when it makes this turn and comes back here, all the smoke goes up here and out the chimney, and that's your oven.

Durrett: Yes.

Deans: The smoke's what heats the oven, but it's all wood. At Blue Springs we was down on the ground level to start out with. Then we had 'em raise it up a bit, and when we moved up here and got in to the barracks, they brought in the logs and they made regular square like this here out of logs and brought it up to about that high and then we put our stoves on that. So it was up to counter-height to work on, see.

Durrett: Yes.

Deans: And we had one going this way and one going that way so our ovens were together.

Durrett: Oh yes.

Deans: Although the army was the one that was supposed to more or less charge for the grub and like that, clothing, Frank used to let us make our own menus. He didn't care. He says "You're allowed 35 cents a day to feed that guy and I don't care what you feed him as long as they don't object and you don't go over 35 cents a day."

Durrett: Be something to get a meal for 35 cents or three meals for 35 cents.

Deans And the only time he'd let us give 'em sandwiches was when we had them working up on the trail, that trail on the other side of the tunnel, you know. Why, we would put the stuff in a truck and take lunch up to them.

Durrett: Yes.

Deans Other than that they want three cooked meals.

Durrett: Yes.

Deans And it was nothing for me to have a case of eggs and go through the whole blasted case for breakfast. And I got so that I knew that different ones would like eggs different.

Durrett: Yes.

Deans Some wants them scrambled, some of 'em wanted them turned over, some of 'em want them sunny side up. So as they come in, when they was back about four fellows or five fellows I'd--

Durrett: --holler down--

Deans . . . holler out "How you want them?" and I'd have them done for 'em when they got there, see.

Durrett: Now, these guys coming in line, you had all these cooks working, were there several lines going by each cook, or how did that work?

Deans No, there was only one line, but see we had a grill, well, we had one big grill where it took the whole two stoves. And then we had ovens here and here, and that grill was a huge thing. It was about three feet wide and about four feet long.

Durrett: Yes.

Deans And you could crack a bunch of eggs on there, see. And one good cook would be just putting the eggs on. He's just cracking eggs; the other one would come along and turn 'em over, see. And we worked it that way, so that they worked together, so one guy wasn't cooking everything for that guy.

Durrett: Yes.

Deans: And we had a lot of hot cakes with an egg, and I got so that I would be turning hot cakes with both hands.

Durrett: And I suppose you broke eggs with both hands too?

Deans No, I never learned to break them with one with one hand.

Durrett: Yes.

Deans: I never did, I always had to use two hands or else get the shells off. (Both laugh)

But there's one fellow today mentioned, he said "Do you remember that ambrosia stuff you used to make." And I said, "Yes." He says, "Tell my wife how to make it. I tried to tell her about and she doesn't know." But all it was, we'd take different kinds of fruit and drain all the juice off from them and then cut it up, and then take the juice and heat it up and thicken it with a little bit of corn starch and pour it over it, so it was stiff like Jell-O.

Durrett: Yes.

Deans And we served that quite a bit.

Durrett: Called that ambrosia, huh? Now I take it we're talking about canned fruit?

Deans: Yes.

Durrett: And you'd pour the juice off and then you heat the juice after you cut the fruit up?

Durrett: You cut the stuff up, then you heat the juice up with a little bit of corn starch.

Deans A little bit of corn starch make it thick and pour it back over.

Durrett: No sugar or anything you add to it?

Deans Oh no, there's no sugar.

Durrett: Made kind of a pudding then.

Deans: Well almost like a Jell-O, only it wasn't gelatin. It was the fruit juice that made it. It was similar to a pudding, yes.

I know when I was here for Christmas a lot of the boys went home. And I say, "Well, we're allowed so much per man. If you ain't here we can spend his money. So boy, they had a feed. I'm telling you, we had a turkey dinner with all the trimmings you, you could think of. Even to plum . . . well I made cherry pudding instead of plum pudding. And the boys that stayed, boy they had a feast.

Durrett: (laughs) They were the lucky ones.

Deans Yes.

Durrett: Yes.

Deans: But like I told Lieutenant Frank when I went in there, I says, "I won't feed 'em nothing that I won't eat.

Durrett: Yes.

Deans And one of the things that the army is kind of strong on, and that's chip beef gravy.

Durrett: Yes.

Deans But they didn't call it chip beef gravy, and I didn't like it and we didn't have it very often. (Laughs)

Durrett: Yes.

Deans: In fact when I ordered stuff from Fort Douglas, I would forget the chip beef. (Laughs)
Then they couldn't say, you gotta have it.

Durrett: Right, if you didn't have it, you couldn't cook it. Yes.

Deans: It was served on toast, so you could imagine what, what they called it.

Durrett: Yah, I heard 'em today (Les laughs) talking about the SOS down there.

Deans: But then when I went to Cedar Breaks, why I had a tent and then a space between it, then I had a cook tent here. Of course I was the only cook there. And the boys would of killed me one morning if they'd of known at the time, but after it was over with when they found out about it why then they was all cooled down. But I mixed my hot cake batter the night before and set it just by the door in my tent. And when I got up in the morning -- we had one of these army pans, you know the big pans -- there was a squirrel . . .

Durrett: . . . swimming around in the batter?

Deans: I just reached in grabbed him by the tail and threw him out side. Stirred it up, "Hot cakes ready." (Both laugh)

[End of interview].