

Tillman Jorgenson
Zion National Park Oral History
CCC Reunion
28 September 1989

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Wayne Hinton: Today is September 28, 1989, at Zion National Park, and I'm interviewing Tillman Jorgenson in conjunction with our CCC reunion. Tillman, you were saying that you didn't think you'd done anything important?

Tillman Jorgenson: I didn't do anything important. I was a pick-and-shovel man on various projects, and I was a first-aid man for, oh, about six months.

Wayne Hinton: Was that towards the end of your CCC?

Tillman Jorgenson: About the central part, and then—

Wayne Hinton: Did they give you special training for that?

Tillman Jorgenson: Just how to administer CC pills. Do you know what a CC pill is?

Wayne Hinton: No. What's a CCC pill?

Tillman Jorgenson: It's about the size of a quarter, and about this thick, and it cures everything.

Wayne Hinton: Everything.

Tillman Jorgenson: Anything from boils—

Wayne Hinton: Take two aspirins a day, huh? (Both laugh)

Tillman Jorgenson: Anything from, like I say, boils to pneumonia.

Hinton: That was a universal cure, then.

Jorgenson: Yeah. No, we used to divvy out cough syrups, and so forth, you know, when they'd get a cold, and—

Hinton: And you'd do that under the doctor's direction?

Jorgenson: Yes. Dr. Clark.

Hinton: A military doctor.

Jorgenson: Yes, yes.

Hinton: His name was Dr. Clark?

Jorgenson: Dr. Clark.

Hinton: Is he the one that used to drink a lot?

Jorgenson: Yeah. He was the boy. (Both laugh) But he was quite a doc.

Hinton: Yeah. Willard Pectol was telling me about him this morning, but he couldn't remember his name.

Jorgenson: Yes.

Hinton: He said when he came into camp, he gave him a shot, and he said he thought he took a run at him. He'd been drinking some wine and was not in total control of his faculties, and hit the bone in his shoulder, and he passed out.

Jorgenson: Oh, boy. Oh, he was giving him a shot in the arm, huh?

Hinton: Yes.

Jorgenson: Yeah, that was the same fellow. He was here for quite a few years.

Hinton: He gave you your first aid training.

Jorgenson: Yeah, what little they would give you. We had to know some mouth-to-mouth business, and I didn't get any practice on that, thought, thank God. (Both laugh)

Hinton: You didn't have any serious accidents or any—

Jorgenson: We didn't have any serious accidents or anything like that. It mostly was bandaging up and just a few things like that.

Hinton: Now, you came into the CCC—according to your registration—in 1937?

Jorgenson: Yeah. July of '37.

Hinton: July. Were you just out of high school?

Jorgenson: No. I quit school in the second year. My family was going under some—it was during the depression.

Hinton: Sure.

Jorgenson: They'd lost their home. I had four brothers, and they all went in the Cs with me. We give them twenty-two dollars out of our thirty dollars a month to buy a new home.

Hinton: Yes

Jorgenson: So that's why.

Hinton: Where was your hometown?

Jorgenson: Gunnison, Utah.

Hinton: Gunnison, Utah. I notice now you're from Santa Monica, California.

Jorgenson: Well, like we said in the registration slip; it's misspelled there.

Hinton: Is it?

Jorgenson: Yes. I'm in the jeweler's business now. When I got out of the army, I took training—jewelry, watch repairs, and so forth. Then I ended up at four or more jewelry stores. I had five altogether. Now I'm down to one. I'm hoping to get rid of it.

Hinton: Semi-retiring

Jorgenson: Semi-retired now. I'm almost seventy years old, and I'm going to retire.

Hinton: You also indicate that you worked up on the switchbacks. I guess that's a lot of rolling rocks.

Jorgenson: I was rolling the rocks down the hill and using what they call a crowbar—it's that big, long bar and picks and shovels.

Hinton: Put the bar under the rocks to roll them?

Jorgenson: Yeah. You'd loosen them up and roll them down the hill, and then they shoveled them into a truck, and off they went.

Hinton: Yes.

Jorgenson: Then my last three months, I was the custodian at the park office up here. It used to be up where the bridge goes across.

Hinton: Yeah, right on the turn.

Jorgenson: Right on the turn. And I had to be up at I think about six in the morning and walk up there—pitch dark.

Hinton: You had to get up at six every morning anyway.

Jorgenson: Every morning. Yeah, well! (Laughs)

Hinton: Didn't that get you out of calisthenics?

Jorgenson: Yeah. It got me out of calisthenics. And then when I was through with my duty, I come back and sack out. I had the rest of the day off.

Hinton: Regardless, you had the rest of the day off?

Jorgenson: Yeah. I would be finished by noon with all my work and I would come back.

Hinton: Did some of them envy you for being off so early?

Jorgenson: Yes, they did.

Hinton: Most of the rest of them would get up at 6:00 and do calisthenics and eat breakfast and go to work . . .

Jorgenson: And off to work they'd go.

Hinton: . . . and get back at about 5:00, or whenever they got them back?

Jorgenson: Yes, that's about the way it was.

Hinton: And you got off at noon?

Jorgenson: Yeah, at noon. But before that, about the first six months I was down here, first we were in Bryce from July until probably October. Then we come down here. We started building fire trails. It was up on the other side of _____ (?) I remember that—way up there. And we were building these fire trails. I don't remember where they went to, or—

Hinton: I think they're probably closed off today.

Jorgenson: They probably are.

Hinton: But they were in the park boundaries, then?

Jorgenson: Yes. Also, there was a big forest fire out here by Cedar City some place, and we went up and fought that.

Hinton: You had some firefighting training . . .

Jorgenson: Yes, yeah.

Hinton: . . . as part of your CCC experience?

Jorgenson: Well, they trained us up there. Hinton: On the job?

Jorgenson: On the job—you bet—shoveling dirt into the bushes, and things like that. Backfiring, you know what they call—build a fire on purpose.

Hinton: Okay, let's see. Oh, you say you worked in the rock quarry down in Springdale?

Jorgenson: It was a gravel pit. It was down on the other side of Rockville.

Hinton: Oh. So it wasn't the actual rock quarry where they were taking the rocks off the hillside?

Jorgenson: No.

Hinton: It was in camp?

Jorgenson: No, it was a rock—it was the gravel pits.

Hinton: What kind of work did you do there?

Jorgenson: Pick and shovel. Shovel them into the trucks, gravel into the trucks.

Hinton: What were they doing with the gravel?

Jorgenson: Well, I don't know exactly what they did with it. They brought it up here for some purpose, I don't know— mixing cement, or what they did with it. But it was sifted gravel. It had been sand and gravel that they must have been using for cement. That was another project

Hinton: That wasn't in conjunction with the . . . ?

Jorgenson: Well, I mean, I don't know what they did with the gravel. They sent it off to another project.

Hinton: And you were in the Bridge Mountain camp . . .

Jorgenson: Yes.

Hinton: . . . for roughly two years?

Jorgenson: Two years.

Hinton: Thirty-seven to thirty-nine.

Jorgenson: Thirty-nine. Of course, we spent our summers up in Bryce.

Hinton: Every summer during both summers you were here, you got shipped out to Bryce

Jorgenson: Yeah. I think they left just a skeleton crew down here because it's so darn hot.

Hinton: Yes.

Jorgenson: And most of the guys went up to Bryce, or some of the sub-camps—Duck Creek, and, well, Cedar Breaks, and then they had another one over in Wayne Wonderland, they called it. And now it's something else. They call it—

Hinton: Was it Capitol Reef?

Jorgenson: Capitol Reef, that's what they call it.

Hinton: You never got in on any of that, then?

Jorgenson: Oh, yeah. Yeah, I went up to Capitol Reef.

Hinton: Did you?

Jorgenson: Yes, and Cedar Breaks too, one time, just for a month or so, you know. It wasn't long period of time.

Hinton: Now, when you went out on those summer camps, you lived in tents as opposed to barracks didn't you?

Jorgenson: Yeah, that's right. And the only barracks they had would be your mess hall and recreation room. That was permanent. The rest of camp was little pyramidal tents.

Hinton: So what would you have in a recreation room like at the Cs camp?

Jorgenson: We had Ping-Pong, I don't remember pool, but I do remember Ping-Pong.

Hinton: Cards?

Jorgenson: —and cards. And then they had the little canteen there you could buy your personal stuff. First, we'd get a dollar's worth of what they called it conscript money, wasn't it?

Hinton: Yes.

Jorgenson: Tickets, you know. You want a Coke, why, you rip one off and give it to them. You don't use money—we used script. Script—yes. That's what it was. Script. Of course, money was a commodity we didn't have much of, anyway.

Hinton: So, the five bucks you got to keep was given to you in script?

Jorgenson: Eight dollars. No, you could do anything you wanted, but we'd buy script.

Hinton: Ah, you'd buy the script so you could make purchases.

Jorgenson: Right. A dollar a book, I think it was. Yeah.

Hinton: And you could buy Coke, and sandwiches, or—?

Jorgenson: Cokes. Not sandwiches. Cokes, candy bars, and that type of thing.

Hinton: Just snack kinds of things?

Jorgenson: Yes. Cigarettes and tobacco.

Hinton: You couldn't buy a beer?

Jorgenson: No. They didn't sell beer, just the soft drinks.

Hinton: Did they have other types of recreational things besides the rec room?

Jorgenson: Well, we had—we had a little basket—not a basketball, but volleyball, we were lucky to have. We put up a net between two posts and had a volleyball court.

Hinton: Just kind of organize your own games?

Jorgenson: Yeah, just organized our own games.

Hinton: You didn't get in on any of the fence-building?

Jorgenson: No. I didn't do fence-building.

Hinton: And trail maintenance?

Jorgenson: Trail maintenance? No.

Hinton: Just fire trails.

Jorgenson: Yeah. Every morning at some places at the switchbacks, there'd be rocks we'd roll down.

Hinton: In the wintertime?

Jorgenson: On the road, we'd go around shoveling those rocks back. I got in on some of that.

Hinton: You'd load them onto a truck or throw them back on the road?

Jorgenson: Well, just scoot them back off in the gutter. I guess when they got so high, they'd load them up and take them away. Yeah, there wasn't that many rocks out there, you know, just a few.

Hinton: Were there many tourists that came to Zion in those days?

Jorgenson: No, there wasn't. Maybe about every ten minutes, a car would come through.

Hinton: Yes.

Jorgenson: Of course, I was here in the off-season, it was the winter. It wasn't summer, you know.

Hinton: But when you worked on places like the switchbacks, would they have flagmen out?

Jorgenson: Yes.

Hinton: Flag the cars?

Jorgenson: Yeah, they flagged the cars. But, like I say, a car would come by every five to ten minutes. That's about all the cars they had in those days.

Hinton: So—

Jorgenson: It's not that way now.

Hinton: No. Heavens, no. It's busy today. We drove up to the lodge area today. It was really busy. I was surprised there were so many people here this late in the season.

Jorgenson: Yes. Yeah, my wife had never been here, so I took her on a little trip up to the Great White Throne and up through the tunnel and the other side.

Hinton: Was she impressed?

Jorgenson: Oh, yeah, she was very impressed with Zion.

Hinton: I guess she'll take some of the tours tomorrow.

Jorgenson: We're taking one tour—the first tour.

Hinton: To get a chance to see what some of the projects were that you worked on?

Jorgenson: Yeah. Yeah, that's going to be exciting. I don't even remember where they're at, you know.

Hinton: Do you remember where the camp was?

Jorgenson: Well, it was over here someplace. I don't know exactly—I can't pinpoint it, but it was across the creek.

Hinton: Yeah. It's across the river.

Jorgenson: Yes. About what location is it?

Hinton: Oh, it's just a little bit east of us.

Jorgenson: East?

Hinton: East and south.

Jorgenson: I know it wasn't very far. I walked from the gate to the camp in just a short walk.

Hinton: Now, when you were with the CCCs, did some of the guys do some foolish kinds of things?

Jorgenson: Oh, we used to do crazy things, yeah. Downtown, when we'd get on our own, why, away from camp, hell, there'd be all kinds of . . .

Hinton: Like in Springdale? Rockville? Hurricane? Where?

Jorgenson: Yeah. We didn't really raise hell or ruin any property—anything like that—but we would go to town and just have a good time. Chase gals around. (Chuckles).

Hinton: Go to dances?

Jorgenson: Yeah, go to dances.

Hinton: Did the local guys resent that?

Jorgenson: Yeah, they would. They didn't like the CC boys coming around. (Laughs). We kind of outnumbered them, I think. They didn't give us too much trouble.

Hinton: Did you have fights in the camp?

Jorgenson: Oh, yeah, there was guys who'd always have their little indifferences, and they'd get out in a special place . . .

Hinton: They just let them have at it, huh?

Jorgenson: Let them have at it, and they'd fight like hell, and then they'd put their arms around one another and walk—walk up to the barracks. (Both laugh).

Hinton: So nobody ever really got hurt bad?

Jorgenson: No, I don't think so. No. You'd swing your fists around a little bit, you know. Yeah. I had a brother here. He'd been transferred down from Eureka, and he's a big fellow, you know. Anyway, we had one guy; he sat at the table. We had a table—I think there would be four guys on each side of the table, you know—the table sized something like these. They would all stand up, and then when we'd sit down, we'd start eating, you know. And this guy was a real challenge. He started grabbing things. And my brother said, "Let's make that guy a pig trough." And we sat down in front of him. So we did. We went to the carpenter shop and made a little pig trough. And this guy come in looking around what was for dinner. He didn't see it, and then he sat down, and there's that pig trough. Well, he got up and walked out, and he said, "Some S of a B," he said, "I'm going to get them for this." And anybody that he would ask would say, "No—nobody done it." But he done some detective work, and he found out who it was. It was me and my brother. Well, he didn't dare to tackle me there because he was in between. I was smaller than him, and my brother was bigger than him. So after my brother got discharged—he got out in March, I think it was, and then I got out in July. But anyway, he went up to Bryce, and I stayed down here. Then when I went up to Bryce to get discharged, why, he met me there, and he says, "I've been waiting for you, boy." (Both laugh) "Let's go across the fence." I said, "Wow, this is just fun. Hell, I've never even been mean to you." And he said, "Well, I going to get you anyway." So we went across, and he jumped across the fence first, and I come back. And before I hit ground, why, he had me down, and he give me about three big slugs in the kisser, you know. And I hollered, "Enough!" But that was the end of my tomfoolery.

Hinton: (laughs)

Jorgenson: I didn't do anything like that again.

Hinton: (laughs) You want to be bigger than the other guy if you get in a fight.

Jorgenson: Yeah.

Hinton: Yeah, you probably had a lot of practical jokes that went on in the camp.

Jorgenson: Oh, yeah. Putting snakes in beds and things like that.

Hinton: Were there a lot of snakes in the park?

Jorgenson: There was little water snakes. You know you'd be there and catch a little water snake down along the river.

Hinton: Yes.

Jorgenson: And we'd take and tie some thread around its tail and stick it in somebody's sack, and when they would. When that snake would hit them, boy, they'd come out.

Hinton: (laughs)

Jorgenson: Real fast!

Hinton: You didn't see many rattlers?

Jorgenson: No. I never seen a rattler yet, never out of captivity, anyway. I never run into a rattler. I suppose there was some down here—rattlesnakes.

Hinton: Did you see many deer in the park?

Jorgenson: Oh, yes. Just about deer season, why a week before deer season, they'd kind of get smart and migrate here. Yeah.

Hinton: As you drove through the park today or last night or whenever it was, you probably saw some deer?

Jorgenson: Oh, yes, right up here by the Great White Throne. Come right up.

Hinton: Pretty poor looking deer.

Jorgenson: Yes, they look kind of scroungy

Hinton: Did they look like that in the CCC days?

Jorgenson: Gee, I don't remember. I don't really remember, but I didn't see any bucks up here. There are a lot of does around, but no bucks. I wonder why they're so scroungy. There's plenty to eat, isn't there?

Hinton: I don't know. I asked the naturalist the other day why they look so bad. There should be plenty for them to eat.

Jorgenson: Yeah, I think so.

Hinton: Well, some of those are young deer. I noticed the one little doe had had a broken leg, and that's why she looked so bad. And I don't know why the rest of them looked that bad.

Jorgenson: I don't either.

Hinton: I've seen some nice deer here, in fact. That's probably what they do, is just eat along the river or food left. . .

Jorgenson: They come from the tourists.

Hinton: Yeah, that's maybe why they look so bad.

Jorgenson: Yeah, they come right up to me.

Hinton: Smell your fingers, do they?

Jorgenson: Yeah.

Hinton: Did you enjoy your days in the CCCs?

Jorgenson: Yes, I did. By gosh, I'm not a bit sorry I went to it. I mean, I met some nice people, and I met people I've still been friends with, you know.

Hinton: Have you seen some here today that you haven't seen for fifty years?

Jorgenson: Yes. Fifty years.

Hinton: Did you recognize them?

Jorgenson: No.

Hinton: Did they recognize you?

Jorgenson: Just by their names.

Hinton: Yeah.

Jorgenson: I remembered their names, but not their faces.

Hinton: But meeting with them, do you recall some of the good old days?

Jorgenson: Oh yes, we've been chewing over some of the—

Hinton: Camp characters?

Jorgenson: Yeah. Things that we used to do and characters. You know, looking back, there's a lot of funny things that went on.

Hinton: Well, at two hundred guys in a camp, I guess you'd expect that.

Jorgenson: Yeah.

Hinton: And after your CCC experience, you said you went in the army when World War II came along.

Jorgenson: Yeah.

Hinton: Did the CCC experience prepare you in any way for that?

Jorgenson: Well, only for discipline probably. We had in the CCs, you know, we had to respect our officers and so forth.

Hinton: Have to say, “Yes, sir,” and “No, sir.”

Jorgenson: Yes, instead of “no.” But that’s about the only thing. It’s similar—just your military experience, you know.

Hinton: Did you take advantage of any of the educational programs they had in the CCCs?

Jorgenson: No, I didn’t.

Hinton: That’s purely optional.

Jorgenson: Yeah, it was. Never took any of the school. They did have schooling.

Hinton: Yes. Well, did it have a pretty good reputation? Did they do some worthwhile things?

Jorgenson: I think so. One fellow said he learned some electronics from some of the instructors that helped him out.

Hinton: When they were taking the pictures, I heard one guy say that he learned to use dynamite, and sure enough, they sent him to Germany in World War II, and he used dynamite.

Jorgenson: Yeah. That was George Middleton from Henrieville. But there was absolutely nothing I learned in the Army that helped me in civilian life.

Hinton: Did you learn how to not volunteer?

Jorgenson: Yes, I learned how to not volunteer.

Hinton: Well, that’s worthwhile, isn’t it?

Jorgenson: Oh, yeah! Well, like I say, I went to watch repair school. That’s where I got my education after the war was over.

Hinton: As you drove through the park—was it yesterday?

Jorgenson: No, today—this morning.

Hinton: As you drove through the park, did you recognize any of the projects you worked on?

Jorgenson: Only the switchbacks up there. That's the only thing that I worked on that I can recognize.

Hinton: So you didn't work on any structures or any—?

Jorgenson: No structures.

Hinton: Or rip-rapping along the river and those kinds of things?

Jorgenson: No—well, yes, we did too. Way up there by the Weeping Rock, across from Weeping Rock, we used to, We would put in some big rocks for the flood—the water would come down and, like, make an S-turn. It used to come up and wash the sand away, so we put these rocks in there, and that's still there.

Hinton: Did you go look at that this morning?

Jorgenson: Yeah—yeah, we could see it from the highway.

Hinton: So you could point to your wife—that out to your wife and say, "Fifty-one years ago, I worked right there"?

Jorgenson: Picked up those big rocks! (Laughs)

Hinton: All by yourself?

Jorgenson: All by myself, yeah. (Laughs) I lifted some pretty good-sized rocks. They'd bring them in by truck, and then we'd just take them and stack them up.

Hinton: With the bigger ones, did you have some kind of equipment to lift them?

Jorgenson: Oh, we didn't have that big of rocks. Nothing that two guys couldn't handle.

Hinton: So what did you use to tie them in? Did you lay them on top of a fence, and then lay a fence over it, or—?

Jorgenson: Just laid on—

Hinton: Or just lay them on the riverbank?

Jorgenson: We laid them on the riverbank at a sort of a slant. We didn't cement them or anything like that.

Hinton: Were they all in place, and they just sort of protected the turn, then?

Jorgenson: Yes—probably. I guess they'd call it flood control or something.

Hinton: Yeah. It was flood control, sure. Probably would have continued to wash that bank back.

Jorgenson: Yes. Is it time?

Hinton: Well, Tillman, I appreciate you spending this time with me. Is there anything else you can think of?

Jorgenson: Well, no. I think I've covered it pretty well.

Hinton: Any interesting experiences that might be of value?

Jorgenson: Gee, I can't think of anything that would be of value.

Hinton: Okay. Well, appreciate your spending your time with me.

Jorgenson: Well, thank you very much.

Hinton: I hope you enjoy the reunion.

Jorgenson: Oh, we do, immensely.

(End of interview)