

**George Middleton
Zion National Park Oral History
CCC Reunion
September 29, 1989**

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Bart Anderson: This is Bart Anderson on September 29th 5:21 in Zion Park concerning the CC program here, oral interview with George Middleton. George when did you come to the CC program, the dates approximately?

George Middleton: The date would be the latter part of 1937 as I recall and I stayed '38 and then I left with courses here and graduated from high school.

Bart Anderson: So how old were you when you came?

George Middleton: Seventeen, Yeah. I left high school and still had a year to go, so I stayed in CC camp about a year and a half and then went back to finish high school.

Bart Anderson: Before you came here where were you living, over to Panguitch or did you come in from the Price group?

George Middleton: No, no. We came in from over in Henrieville where we joined, but we joined the Springdale is where we enlisted, went down to Springdale. Then worked here and worked Bryce Canyon.

Bart Anderson: So you worked in both camps?

George Middleton: Both camps.

Bart Anderson: So were you out here with the Bridge Mountain crew here or what was the name of your camp here? Do you remember?

George Middleton: 962.

Bart Anderson: What was your duty, your first duty as you came in?

George Middleton: I think we did either the rifraff in the river up here above the bridge or it was that big slide as you come out of the tunnel.

Bart Anderson: Worked on the gradient there?

George Middleton: Yes we pulled hoses up there and blasted. We drilled holes and blasted rocks.

Bart Anderson: So what was your duty when you were on the gradient? Were you a blaster or a driller?

George Middleton: I was pulling the hose and drilling the holes. Another guy did the powder.

Anderson: Had you had any previous experience or how did you learn how to run a drill just on the job?

Middleton: No, just on the job yeah. Yeah we drilled holes down in the creek bed. We had blast a lot of rocks out of there in order to tear away from the creek bed and then we rip-rapped it all. And then we worked over here on the homes that's kind of back up in there just as you make the bend across the bridge in there. And the camp of course was across the river over here on the other side.

Anderson: Do you have any stories that are very unique to your group?

Middleton: Well yeah. You know CC camp was not all fun but some guys made it a lot of fun. A lot of times they'd come in and pull the bunks over. I had one group from Escalante and they were all in usually one bunk house and another group from other places like Springdale and if a little partying was going on one group from Escalante would come over and want to see a fight, why they'd stir up a fight.

Anderson: I know there was probably boxing but there was actually good fist fights?

Middleton: Oh yeah. Once they crossed the bridge went down here, there was some pretty good fights. I wouldn't name any names cause they were here today some of them but there was some real good fights. And they'd go down to town though. Bill Evans' beer hall. He'd kind of say, "You're not old enough to drink, but you're still in there, in the pool hall I guess." But anyway that's where you'd hang a lot out would be the pool hall, it's just a beer hall.

Anderson: Were you with any particular group, I mean your duties would start at what time in the morning?

Middleton: Usually in the morning, they transferred you on a lot of the jobs. I worked down here on the crusher; I worked up in the main canyon, but the one particular one that nobody has ever mentioned, I don't think, is we trapped a lot of deer up here by where the lodge is back against the bench there and we'd trap the deer. Some said they were trapping them because there was too many there. Well there was a lot of deer, but they were trapping them to start the herd out on the Kaibab Forest. We'd trap the deer here and load them in a truck. Bob Stowell and Mel F_____ (?), and I don't know who else trapped deer with me, but I was one of them that would run the traps. We'd load 'em and haul 'em, clean out on the Kaibab Forest and turn them loose. You don't haul just one deer to the traps. That was just one of the projects that we did here.

Anderson: How was the food? Was it pretty good?

Middleton: Well, now I changed jobs after that and I don't know what kind of a job you'd call it, but I'd go down to the kitchen and get all the food for Lieutenant Wall and all the others,

you know, and I'd serve the officers. They wouldn't eat in the mess with the regular old CC guys. I was one of those. I don't know whether there was anyone else, but I know I was one that brought their food up to them. So I ate pretty good. And Gail _____ ran the kitchen and he was a pretty good cook and Karl Lowder.

Anderson: What can you remember about the entertainment? What'd you do in the evenings?

Middleton: Well for quite a while they put on shows for one week. I don't know what it was, like during the biblical days. I don't know who sponsored it the park service or who it was. It seemed to me like we just got up there on this here little flat and they had it at nighttime and they had the lights.

Anderson: They had a biblical production?

Middleton: Oh yes. There was a lot of those; I was in a lot of the plays. It's like during the old time warring days during the . . . I don't know what period of time it was in but you've seen those with the swords and the lightning. We used to put them on up there. I don't remember just exact time but it seemed like it was somewhere about probably Easter or somewhere in there. I'm not too sure of when they put those things on, but I think they put them on for about three or four years and then they decided it was too big of a deal.

Anderson: Was this open for the tourists?

Middleton: Anybody that came.

Anderson: Were there a lot of tourists that came here when you were here?

Middleton: Well considering the road conditions and like that. I don't remember meeting many

Anderson: You didn't meet many tourists yourself?

Middleton: No. I remember up here when we was doing the trail work and like that and across the swinging bridge. I don't remember the name of that trail now. It's the one where you cross the swinging bridge and we worked on that trail there and we had some there, you know, a lot of people were coming in and exploring.

Anderson: When you were on trail work, you did work trails? There's a lot of cement that's been poured on those trails, did you mix up any of that cement?

Middleton: Oh no. There's only one place that I know; mostly it was done with just rock. You know we'd dig down and get a good base to it and then lay the rock on top, but if there's cement at that trail I didn't know it.

Anderson: How about your weekends off? What would you do?

Middleton: Now we was just down here in the wintertime cause in the summertime we went up to Bryce and Mr. Roberts usually had an educational thing going on. On Sunday, you just kind of roamed around and maybe give Springdale hell, I don't know.

Anderson: Did you go into St. George at all?

Middleton: No I don't remember going to St. George.

Anderson: So just strictly Springdale?

Middleton: Yeah.

Anderson: Okay. When you went back up to Bryce, you were up there in the summer, what did you do at Bryce?

Middleton: Well we did the trails. We built the trails down to the canyons and then we did the lodges or the houses like these here. They used to be way down in the lower part of that creek and we sawed 'em in two, put 'em on skids and brought the 'em up to where they're presently at there in Bryce now. We pulled them on skids. .

Anderson: Now when you were transported between one place in Bryce and here, were you in trucks when you came?

Middleton: Yeah just a big old dump truck.

Anderson: Can you remember any tragedies or any accidents whether it be here or Bryce? Anybody get hurt?

Middleton: No I don't.

Anderson: You yourself didn't even have to see a doctor?

Middleton: No, no. We fought fires out here and I know that brought a number of them out. The fire was on top just as you go through the tunnel and you go up a truck road there and you look right down in Zion Canyon. We fought fires there for about two weeks, and I know that there was some guys that got caught with smoke inhaled. It was a nasty fire.

Anderson: Oh I had never heard about that.

Middleton: Yeah and that's about it and the food didn't get there very often. We was up there quite a while. Two weeks was a long period to be there

Anderson: About how cold was it?

Middleton: I'll tell you one thing maybe somebody hasn't mentioned. We were out to Bryce Canyon. Now somebody's gotta remember this, but when we went out there to Bryce

Canyon Shirley Temple, now she's Shirley Temple Black, she came out there and paid us a visit out to Bryce. I remember she was a little gal about, oh maybe three feet tall and it was quite an occasion 'cause she was really in popularity right then. A cute red-headed gal you know and she came out and so as a camp we went down and she put the performance on. It was quite a treat I thought. But out there we lived in tents; stayed out there until it got cold, really cold.

Anderson: Were your sleeping conditions, whether it be here or there, primitive? I mean did you have plenty of blankets or was it cold?

Middleton: Well the barracks weren't built very well. I mean they was just a single thing here and so in the wintertime here I think it got as cold here as we did up to Bryce because up to Bryce we had that big cone stove in the middle and we had just the cots up at Bryce. You'd keep that fire going in your tent and it stayed pretty nice. But these barracks here weren't too bad, but in the wintertime it got cold here. First of all they said you needed to have the good seats. You had kind of like a mattress cover, you know, if you didn't have a very good mattress. At that time it was straw mattresses.

As far as I can recall, it did a great bit to build up the young men for military life because we did have to stand reveille and had uniforms and like that because the biggest share of us went right directly into the army afterwards.

Anderson: What did you do for washing your uniforms and such?

Middleton: We washed them ourselves.

Anderson: In the stream or did they have a washing machine?

Middleton: Not a washing machine, just a wash room.

Anderson: Wash room?

Middleton: Yeah I don't think they had washing machines then.

Anderson: On the old washboard?

Middleton: Yeah.

Anderson: How about showers? Did they have showers?

Middleton: Yeah we had a shower place there, but I don't remember. You know it was just good in those days. It was a good start, but cleanliness was one of the things that was stressed.

Anderson: Really stressed.

Middleton: Oh yes and you had to dress neatly and not be just bumming looking.

Anderson: How about when you went out on your different details, I imagine not everybody worked there was goldbrickers. Was there a way to keep people motivated to working?

Middleton: Well I think they just told them. Hey they had some supervisors here Mr. Johnson and Marion Willis, guys like that, that was real, work-oriented supervisors. They believed in getting the work job done and if you didn't, I think probably the worst thing that you wouldn't wanna do is get sent down to the crusher.

Anderson: That's where the bad detail was?

Middleton: Right that was the bad detail and if you didn't want to work here, they'd send you to the crusher. And you just had to be around the crusher to have enough.

Anderson: Did anybody you know ever walk off the job here, you know just said the heck with it?

Middleton: Oh I heard this bus driver tell us here. He drove us today. He said he was here fifty some days and he says he just went AWOL and went down to Las Vegas and got him a job and stayed there.

Anderson: Oh is that right? But you didn't know anybody like that?

Middleton: No I don't know what they'd do. I guess they'd just give you a . . . My discharge just says honorable discharge. I guess all they'd do if you walked off all they'd do is issue you a dishonorable thing, but I don't know what because you weren't sworn to anything other than you would obey the rules of the camp and that's why you were here. And I know that if some guys got real out of hand here, then they were shipped out.

Anderson: You did have occasionally out of hand?

Middleton: Well there was another camp that we knew and they were from Kentucky and Indiana and they had guys that got that way and those guys were shipped right out. I don't know those guys didn't like each other and they'd get to fighting and use knives and everything. I know they were shipped out or they were probably just sent home.

Anderson: Did you ever participate in any activities or sports with any of the other camps like those Kentucky ones? Did you play baseball against them?

Middleton: Well I'll tell you when it used to get this way now I'll tell you we'd go down to Panguitch when we was in Bryce Canyon. Now here we'd go down to Rockville to the dance. Just the end of Rockville there's a little graveyard. but there's a little hill on the side of it and that's where the dances were held on top of that little hill. Now didn't have troubles here because most of the guys here were, at that time, if there was a fight it was just a minor thing. but when we went to Panguitch they wouldn't let our camp and the Duck Creek camp come into Panguitch at the same time. The Duck Creek camp was

coming in one weekend, then we weren't allowed to. We had to wait 'til the next weekend because you'd get the two of the camps and they just ...

Anderson: So you never had any inter-rivalry competitions?

Middleton: No. I didn't actually have any. There might have been some, but I didn't know.

Anderson: You weren't involved. Do you remember any humor stories?

Middleton: None that would be too humorous.

Anderson: Well that's okay; I'll take any story.

Middleton: Well, we got a fellow that's a pretty good guy nowadays. He used to sharpen saws and Cecil Dodge, he run the day room or pool hall, and this other guy he sharpened saws in the tent. Marion Willis knew that this fellow had wine cause he drank wine night and day and he knew he had it but he didn't know where. And so we was in there one day and this guy says, "Is the coast clear?" Yeah. And he just reached over the tent ropes with all, because one tent rope he just undid and this bucket would come down out of right up in the very top of the tent and it was a gallon of wine and that's where he'd been keeping his wine all the while.

Anderson: Did they catch him?

Middleton: Oh, no; I think he just cured himself.

Anderson: Because most of these people in Utah here at these camps, there probably was not a drinking problem going on there?

Middleton: No, no there wasn't. The other time I'll tell you about, Marion Willis used to have a saying, and we got up to Bryce and all we got for breakfast was a piece of bacon and a piece of toast.

Anderson: Oh it wasn't regular breakfast?

Middleton: No somehow or other the food detail got fouled up and that was it. So we all lined up out there and refused to go work and went on strike, no food, no work. Marion Willis would walk down out there and he would say, "Good golly sakes." "You know fellas," he'd say, "They'll court martial you for this, they'll court martial you sure." But at least the word got around and I know some other officers and that come up and there was a mix-up in getting the food up, but our whole camp lined up and refused to go to work.

Anderson: How long?

Middleton: Just that one day is all.

Anderson: They got food brought right up?

Middleton: Yeah, kind of like this teachers strike.

Anderson: Did you play any pranks on any of the other ones that you can think of?

Middleton: Oh I'm sure there was more short sheeting here than there was in the army because you know here it was quite a common thing for somebody to do.

Anderson: Was there an initiation when a new person come into the company? Did you initiate 'em in any way?

Middleton: Well not me. I wasn't big enough to. I was seventeen years of age and about a hundred and some odd pounds, you know. But it wasn't long 'cause they fed you good and you grew fast in the CC camp and it was good physically and good every which way for the guys.

Anderson: Did you learn anything in the CCs that you used later in life other than the ability to work?

Middleton: Well I worked with dynamite here, you know, helping with the dynamite. Then I used dynamite over in Germany in the war.

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Middleton: . . . did em here and so when they went out they were pretty capable of doing that and then I noticed quite a bit those guys here in the CC camp, like myself that went into the army, they had enough background military-wise and leadership-wise that in the army that they advanced in the army quicker.

Anderson: How often did you get passes to go back to your home? Is there a rhyme or reason how a person got a pass?

Middleton: No I think it was just when you could afford to go and when you had someplace that you could go. There was nothing on the weekend to restrict you except KP duty which come your turn, you know or something like that. Or if you got fouled up and you didn't get on the list you didn't get a pass because that's what regulated whether you really got to go or not is if you was on the list good or bad. There was a number of us and I for one had a car which was illegal; we weren't supposed to have cars.

Anderson: You put it outside the camp?

Middleton: Yes, but then when you come down to the park why of course there was no rangers to speak of then, but you'd always have to take the car outside the park across to Springdale but it was good means. I remember one time, now he passed away last year

and his wife's here today, but we were down in LaVerkin and we ran out of gas right there on the hill, and old Grant, I guess I could use his name Grant Dalton, he stopped and he said, "I'll get some money for the gas." And we all had to get back to camp. He stopped and he says, "I'll walk across that bridge," on his hands for a dollar. I know there was tourists and I cannot remember just who else was in that car. There was six of us in my little Model A car. They said, "Grant, they wouldn't do that" and he said, "Well I'll do it anyways." So this one woman says, "All right. I don't wanna watch ya." So they gave us a dollar and Grant walked across that bridge on his hands.

Anderson: Which bridge?

Middleton: This is the one that's over the deep gorge down there by LaVerkin.

Anderson: On the railing?

Middleton: Yes.

Anderson: He walked on the railing on his hands to get a dollar for gasoline?

Middleton: That's what we used it for.

Anderson: Oh boy!

Middleton: Yeah Grant Dalton, he was a real good friend and a good sport.

Anderson: I guess you made some lasting friendships didn't you?

Middleton: Oh yes. That's what this is all about today these guys. This is forty some odd years, you know, and you miss a few of them. I think the thing that we slipped up here today on this one is not paying tribute to those that were here last year, that died since we had the one at Bryce because we're all getting older. When you get around the seventy mark, why you better look for that. Grant he moved down to Washington down here, but he was quite a sportsman and a real joker. We had a first sergeant who was called Scipio. It wasn't his right name. He was called Scipio because he was from the town of Scipio, but his name was Clayton Edwards. Big, big first sergeant down there, well liked guy.

Anderson: Did you personally get sick or have anything that you had to go to the doctor for?

Middleton: Not to my knowledge.

Anderson: So you were quite well all the way through.

Middleton: Yeah. I don't think I went from (?). I'm not too sure. Well we had our own doctor who was Doctor Clark, a little teeny fella so if you ever went to him why he'd just kind of smile at you, you know, and ask how the weather is. He was probably a fine doctor, but he used more psychology than anything else.

Anderson: Now did you get involved in that flu? There was a good flu that went through the camp a couple of winters?

Middleton: I didn't. I remember when there was a lot of them were sick, but I was, in fact I think it was this camp here it went through, but we were at Bryce in the cold weather, .

Anderson: Yeah it'll get you up there.

Middleton: We were up there doing bug trees; we cut down bug trees and peeled the bark off.

Anderson: When you look back on it, was it a good experience?

Middleton: Oh yes. Your can break life your life down. I spent, you know, almost two years here in the CC camp and I spent five years in the army. When I come out I was twenty-four years in law enforcement, and I was six years as a county commissioner. I'm back here today and I'm thankful for it..

Anderson: That's great. So that was you kind of get a good feel for the CCs?

Middleton: I think it was a good starting of more responsibilities I had.

Anderson: Well it looks like you've done well and I certainly appreciate talking to you of course.

Middleton: Well I didn't...

Anderson: Yeah you did. You gave us some insight into it that I didn't know (?). Thank you very much.

[End of Interview]