

**Leon Miller**  
**Zion National Park Oral History Project**  
**CCC Reunion**  
**28 September 1989**

Interviewed by: Wayne Hinton  
Transcribed by: Jessica Barker  
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Wayne Hinton: This is Wayne Hinton, September 28, 1989, at 9:45 AM at Zion National Park, interviewing Leon Miller, a veteran of the CCC program. Leon, when did you go into the CCCs

Leon Miller: Oh, that's the trouble, I can't remember dates anymore. You know, I don't have any papers left. I don't know what happened to my discharge papers. I haven't got anything like that.

Wayne Hinton: Did you enroll in Cedar City?

Leon Miller: No. I think it was St. George, Washington. I lived in Washington, and I think that's where I enrolled from.

Wayne Hinton: You have no idea how old you were at the time you enrolled, then?

Leon Miller: I know—I believe I was just about seventeen, somewhere right in there.

Wayne Hinton: Were you out of high school or still in?

Leon Miller: Yeah. I was out of high school.

Wayne Hinton: You had graduated from high school?

Leon Miller: No, I never did graduate, but I was about seventeen. And I only spent about a year in there.

Wayne Hinton: So you reenlisted after your first six-month enlistment?

Leon Miller: I believe I did.

Wayne Hinton: So you spent a year?

Leon Miller: Pretty close to a year.

Wayne Hinton: Okay. On your registration form, you indicate that you spent most of your time working on trails in the park, switchbacks?

Leon Miller: Switchbacks on the highway, and most of my time I think was spent in the quarry, the rock quarry.

Wayne Hinton: Down in Springdale or above Springdale?

Leon Miller: Above Springdale.

Hinton: Were you up on the sides quarrying the rock off the hillside, or where were you at?

Miller: No, I was breaking the big old slabs like this and I would break them into long sections. And then they'd haul them to the building sites, wherever they was building and then break them up there into the size they wanted.

Hinton: You have no idea, then, what year that might have been?

Miller: Well, it had to be—I think it had to be—in 1939.

Hinton: And you graduated high school in what? Spring of '38 or '39? I mean, you would have, but you said you didn't graduate, that's right.

Miller: It would probably have been about '38. See, I went to many different schools that time in my life. I went to five different schools, I think, in the fifth grade—moving around so much that I couldn't get interested in school.

Hinton: You say also you worked as a carpenter for a short time.

Miller: Yes. When my uncle got out, he was camp carpenter.

Hinton: Who was your uncle?

Miller: Willard Franklin. And when he got out—he got out before I did, out of the Cs—and when he got out, why, I don't know, they put me in charge of barracks repair around there. I repaired screen doors and steps and things like that—small jobs. Like I say, the biggest part of my time was spent in the rock quarry breaking these rocks into long strips where they took them to the building sites.

Hinton: And you lived in the barracks?

Miller: Yes.

Hinton: You stayed in the barracks? The barracks were just to the east and the south of us, I suppose, weren't they?

Miller: Probably. It's hard to tell anymore—things have changed so much, you know. You can't get over there on that side of the creek anymore.

Hinton: Yes, you can.

Miller: Well, there's a bridge over there, but, I mean, isn't there buildings over here?

Hinton: Yes. There are residents for the Park Service employees over in there where the camps were. So in 1939, when you were with the CCCs, there had already been about six years of CCC work.

Miller: Yeah.

Hinton: And the camp routine was probably pretty well established by then.

Miller: I think so.

Hinton: You had military people that kind of ran the camp and supplied equipment . . .

Miller: Yeah.

Hinton: . . . and then a supervisor that did the job assignments.

Miller: That's right. And I can't even remember that supervisor's name that was over the rock quarry out there. I know we had a nickname for him: Coffee Nerves.

Hinton: Coffee Nerves? What did that imply? That he was nervous?

Miller: He was a nervous-type character. And he drank a lot of coffee. I remember that.

Hinton: It kept him going then.

Miller: Yes. I can't remember his name, though, to save me.

Hinton: You remember some of the other guys that were in the camp at the time you were here?

Miller: Very few. I can remember very few of them. Some of the guys from Washington down there, like Glen Milne, and my uncle Willard and Ren Spendlove from Hurricane.

Hinton: So just some of the Washington County guys?

Miller: Yeah, that's about all. A few of the guys, like the Priors from Minersville and up in that area. But I can't remember too many of the guys anymore. I never did get too many pictures; apparently, I didn't have a camera. I got the picture of that guy, and I can't put a name on him even. I thought maybe I'd bring this picture. If he showed up, maybe I could recognize him.

Hinton: That looks like he's in his CCC-issued uniform. That's not his work uniform, however, is it?

Miller: No. I don't believe so.

Hinton: And that's the only picture that you have?

Miller: That's the only one I can come up with. And I didn't put a name on it, so I don't know who he is even. Don't remember.

Hinton: At the time you were here, did they have more than just the one camp? Were there two camps?

Miller: I think there was only one camp here because in my mind there were at least three barracks in that one camp.

Hinton: About two hundred men, then?

Miller: Somewhere around there—two or three hundred. I still have my old footlocker, and that's the information I still have stenciled on the top of that footlocker.

Hinton: Does that mean anything to you?

Miller: Just the company.

Hinton: (reading) National Park 4, Company 962, Bridge Mountain Camp.

Miller: Bridge Mountain Camp—the name of it. My uncle says he doesn't even have his footlocker, and he don't even remember ever grabbing one. But this one's still in good shape.

Hinton: That was issued to you when you came into the CCCs, then?

Miller: Yes.

Hinton: Okay. Did you feel that the work you were doing was worthwhile?

Miller: Oh, yeah. You bet.

Hinton: One person told me that he thought about 80 percent of the improvements had been done by the CCCs, and they have been lucky to just maintain since that time.

Miller: Yes.

Hinton: You would agree with that?

Miller: I agree. We did a lot of work on them switchbacks hauling loose rocks on them hills. We'd go up and roll them down—seemed like every other day. They'd get loose, and we'd go up with crowbars and roll them down them switchbacks and then go clean them up.

Hinton: Would you haul them off?

Miller: Yeah. We had the old dump trucks. We'd haul them off. I don't remember where they went to.

Hinton: Did they have pretty good-size crews working up there?

Miller: Yeah. Yeah. We had, oh, thirty or forty guys up there rolling rocks.

Hinton: They must have done something to stabilize those hillsides so that that wasn't a continual problem after the CCC days.

Miller: Yeah, but I can't see anything now except the brush that's growing there to help stabilize it.

Hinton: Did they do any replanting at the time you were working on those switchbacks?

Miller: I can't remember any replanting.

Hinton: The days you were assigned to work up there, they you put in trucks that conveyed up to the switchbacks from the barracks?

Miller: Yeah.

Hinton: Now in the CCC camps, there were opportunities for education and training and those sorts of things. Did you participate in any of that?

Miller: I can't remember ever participating in that.

Hinton: Those were volunteer programs; you didn't sign up for any special training?

Miller: I can't remember doing that, no.

Hinton: Did you feel that your experience here provided you with any special skills that made you employable in the job market when you left the CCCs?

Miller: No, not really.

Hinton: Nothing you used in the long run.

Miller: I never did go into the rock quarry again.

Hinton: Let's see. You worked at the iron mine at Cedar, though, didn't you?

Miller: No. I worked at the power company all the time I was there.

Hinton: At Cal-Pac?

Miller: Yeah.

Hinton: I knew you when you lived in Cedar, of course; you were a neighbor. I was thinking that you worked out at the mines.

Miller: No. I started when it was Southern Utah Power, and then Cal-Pac took over, and then Utah Power, and then the one we got now, the PacificCorp.

Hinton: Why did you leave the CCCs after a year? Did you have an employment opportunity?

Miller: Seems like I did. I can't really remember, but I believe I did. I went to work for my uncle in California, driving dump truck. So maybe I did get a little experience here 'cause I remember trying out for a dump truck driving job up there on them switchbacks. On the old truck they had, you had to put your foot on the foot feed and wrap it around the gearshift to hold it in gear.

Hinton: You had to hold it in gear with your leg?

Miller: You had to hold it in gear with your leg.

Hinton: That would be nice on those switchbacks. (Chuckles)

Miller: I got some experience there. Maybe it did help me a little there.

Hinton: Yeah. That sounds like it may have given you some experience.

Miller: Anyway, I worked for him down there, I think it was around Beverly Hills, in a landscape business, driving the dump truck, hauling top soil, planting lawns.

Hinton: Were those truck-driving jobs pretty highly prized here in the park?

Miller: They were.

Hinton: Looks like it'd be a better job than rolling rocks.

Miller: Yeah, they were. They were highly prized, but for some reason or other, I didn't work out on that dump truck.

Hinton: Were there any real camp characters in the camp that you can remember? Any guys that kind of stood out as practical jokers and so forth?

Miller: Oh, yeah. A lot of practical jokes went on in that camp. It was going *all* the time. And this best friend of mine, Murray Burgess from St. George, he got the brunt of it. They was always getting him.

Hinton: Why was that?

Miller: I don't know. He got going to sleep easy, you know? And when he'd go to sleep or doze off, why, they'd get him! Give him a hot foot or tie his shoelaces together and wake him up. [Laughs.]

Hinton: Then he'd run and fall on his face.

Miller: Then he'd fall, yeah.

Hinton: Well, did he fall for that more than once?

Miller: Yeah. A lot of times. And then when he'd get to drinking and come back into camp, you know, that's when they'd get him. Poor guy. I felt sorry for him a lot of times.

Hinton: They didn't allow drinking in the camp, did they?

Miller: No.

Hinton: But when you went out on weekends or R&R?

Miller: Yes. We'd get out to Hurricane on the weekend and come back. Why, we'd all be pretty well soused up, you know?

Hinton: So some of the enrollees had automobiles?

Miller: Yeah. I was one of them.

Hinton: You had a car?

Miller: I had an old 1934 Chrysler Coupe, parked it down to, oh, a family down here called Winsor.

Hinton: Yes, down in Springdale.

Miller: Down in Springdale. They let me park it over at their place. We'd go down every weekend, four of us, and jump in that and head for Hurricane, LaVerkin, and Washington.

Hinton: Did you have to have a pass to get out on a weekend?

Miller: I can't remember of ever having a pass. We were just free on the weekend.

Hinton: So when the workday ended on Friday, you didn't have to be back here till Sunday?

Miller: Monday morning.

Hinton: You didn't have to spend Sunday night here, then?

Miller: No. We got in here Monday morning just in time to go back to, well, calisthenics that they had every morning.

Hinton: Did they have reveille each morning?

Miller: Yeah. Yeah, we had to get up at a certain time. Old Scipio, our top sergeant, his name was Scipio—nickname—Clinton Edwards I think was his real name. He'd come through and wake us up every morning and get us out for calisthenics. Anyway, we had to be here for that Monday morning.

Hinton: Did you go to breakfast before calisthenics or after calisthenics?

Miller: Seems like it was after. I can't really remember.

Hinton: You'd have breakfast, and then you'd be detailed to the various job assignments.

Miller: Yeah.

Hinton: There probably were several jobs going on during that one year you were here.

Miller: Yes, there was.

Hinton: Do you remember what some of them were besides the carrying of the rocks on the switchbacks?

Miller: Well, I know some of the guys were building this building, a service building that's up past the visitor center.

Hinton: Up Oak Creek Canyon?

Miller: Yeah.

Hinton: Okay.

Miller: That garage or whatever it is up there.

Hinton: Yeah.

Miller: That was one of the buildings they was building.

Hinton: So you were quarrying rock, and they were sending it up there?

Miller: Yeah. That was one of them. And then I remember going up to Duck Creek, at the ranger's station up there, and working around there.

Hinton: On Cedar Mountain?

Miller: Yes.

Hinton: So you were detailed out of here. Did you have a spike camp up at Duck Creek—stay there?

Miller: I think we just camped there—just camped out in tents.

Hinton: You'd stay there during the week, then?

Miller: We'd probably stay a week at a time working around the ranger's station and the campground there.

Hinton: Now, that would have been on the National Forest, rather than Park Service.

Miller: Yes.

Hinton: So there was probably pretty good cooperation.

Miller: Yeah. There must have been. A lot of the guys remember going up to Bryce, but I never did get out there.

Hinton: Well, Bryce was administered by Zion, and in the summertime, they'd send some of the CCC boys there.

Miller: I know my uncle remembers going up there, getting timber that had been eaten by bugs or killed by bugs. They'd go in there and saw that timber down for the Forest Service. I never got in on any of that.

Hinton: Did you get in on any of the replanting that was done here in the park . . .

Miller: Trees?

Hinton: . . . reforestation and so forth?

Miller: I can't remember of ever planting any trees. I got in on trails, cleaning, repairing trails.

Hinton: Not making trails, but repairing mostly.

Miller: Mainly repairing. Like the East Rim trail—I remember working on that. The Emerald Pools trail—I remember working on that. Those are about the only two I can remember.

Hinton: Okay. Leon, do you remember anything about the recreational opportunities?

Miller: I remember baseball games.

Hinton: Played right here in the park?

Miller: Yes.

Hinton: Where did they play them at? You got to play it on a diamond somewhere.

Miller: Yeah. We had a diamond right there in the campground. But I remember we'd have teams from other CCC camps with leagues, like Leeds and what not, that we would meet with, you know, and play. And sometimes we'd play here, and sometimes we'd go down there and play. [Those were] about the only games I remember playing.

Hinton: They didn't have boxing or foot races or anything like that?

Miller: Probably did, but I can't remember.

Hinton: Okay.

Miller: I remember what Willard talks about, remembering boxing, but I can't remember it. They just didn't interest me, I guess.

Hinton: Well, they probably would have interested Willard. I think he had a son or a grandson that was quite a boxer, didn't he?

Miller: Yeah. I think he was, too.

Hinton: Yeah. So he may have gotten involved in it.

Miller: Yeah. He probably did. But I don't remember boxing or anything like that. But I do remember the baseball games. We had some good ones.

Hinton: Did you have a pretty good record?

Miller: (chuckles) I can't remember. I know it was a lot of fun, and the trips we made down Cedar Mountain was usually in the summer when it was real hot down here, you know. Boy, that was a treat to get in the pie wagon and go up on Cedar Mountain.

Hinton: The pie wagon? What was that?

Miller: Oh, just a canvas covered wagon with seats back there along the sides, you know, where we sat. We called it a pie wagon.

Hinton: So a truck then, more or less?

Miller: Yeah, just a truck.

Hinton: Almost like a troop carrier or personnel carrier in the army?

Miller: Yes. About the same thing.

Hinton: Of World War II vintage, a little earlier I guess if you were here in '39.

Miller: After fifty years, my memory's just about gone on everything here. And then I was only in here about a year.

Hinton: Well, a normal enlistment was six months and then you had to reenlist. Did five dollars a month seem like a lot of money to you?

Miller: (Chuckles) Well, it seems like it. But you know most of us, if they was all like me, and I imagine they were, we'd get home by the time the check got there.

Hinton: You'd get it from your parents, then?

Miller: We'd get it from parents.

Hinton: Your parents were pretty good—they let you have it, then?

Miller: Yeah. They'd let us have it.

Hinton: They got twenty-five bucks, and you got five.

Miller: Yes.

Hinton: Well, there weren't too many places to spend the money up here, were there? Other than gas for your automobiles.

Miller: That's about all around here. Of course, we'd chase the girls down in Hurricane and LaVerkin; that took a little money.

Hinton: Did the CCC ever organize dances or those kinds of things?

Miller: I believe they did. Yeah. I think so.

Hinton: They'd bring girls here, and you'd have dances here in the park?

Miller: I can't remember whether they brought girls here or not, but it runs in my mind that we did have dances and social things like that.

Hinton: Did you enjoy your year with the CCCs?

Miller: Oh, yes, I enjoyed it. I wish we'd have had reunions like this a little sooner, you know?

Hinton: Twenty-five years ago.

Miller: Yeah. At least twenty-five—maybe I wouldn't have forgot so much. Maybe more of the guys would have been around.

Hinton: Are quite a few of the guys gone that you were in the camp with?

Miller: Oh, I think they must be. The ones I've saw so far, I don't recognize.

Hinton: None of them, other than Willard Pectol.

Miller: Yeah, that's all so far. I don't know whether the guys that I remember would even come, like Clair Hafen and one of your relatives probably—what's his first name? Delwin Hinton from LaVerkin.

Hinton: I don't know whether he'll come either. I've got a list of those that registered, but I don't remember that one being in there.

Miller: I don't think he will come. I give him a call—he lives in Las Vegas—and he said he couldn't make it.

Hinton: How large a crew did they have at the quarry?

Miller: Oh, there was a good crowd of them, so it must have been forty—at least forty guys—forty to fifty.

Hinton: Now, that was work you could do year-round? You could do that in wintertime, regardless of the season?

Miller: Yeah. We could do that any time. It never did get too cold here in the winter.

Hinton: Some winters probably did during the course of the eight years of the CCC program, but '39 was a good winter, then?

Miller: Seems to me like it, yeah.

Hinton: No snow?

Miller: Well, they was probably a little snow. But I don't remember snow stopping us any from any of the things we were doing.

Hinton: You never had any days, then, that you had to shut down the operation because of weather?

Miller: No.

Hinton: Some days in the summertime, maybe you would have liked to because it was too hot.

Miller: Yeah. I remember the heat; it was pretty warm in this canyon in the summertime.

Hinton: Did they allow you to take your shirts off and those kinds of things when it was summertime?

Miller: I believe so, yeah. I believe they did.

Hinton: You never got involved in any of the rif raff work along the river and the erosion control and that sort of thing, then?

Miller: No, I don't believe I did. I can't remember that, anyway.

Hinton: Was the crew at the quarry essentially the same guys each day, then? That was an assignment that was a fairly long-term assignment.

Miller: Yeah.

Hinton: And you would know in advance what you would be doing?

Miller: I think so, yeah.

Hinton: And there was always plenty to do?

Miller: Always. They always kept us busy.

Hinton: Did it seem like the supervisors drove you pretty hard, or were they fairly relaxed about it?

Miller: Oh, I don't think they were too hard. Now, that Coffee Nerves, he was a nervous type character, and he didn't like you sitting around too much, but he'd give you a break once in a while. He didn't really push you too hard. The other supervisors—I remember one Johnny Excell, something like that was his name—

Hinton: From Springdale?

Hinton: Springdale. He was a good guy. Most all the guys that worked for him said he was easy to work for, a good guy to get along with. I don't believe I ever worked under him; I just mainly knew this guy to the rock quarry and some other guy out there at the switchbacks, and I can't remember his name, either.

Hinton: How large a crew would they have on those switchbacks on a given day?

Miller: Oh, there would always be thirty to forty guys.

Hinton: That was probably before the road was oiled. Was it oiled in '39?

Miller: I believe it was.

Hinton: So it was oiled. So was there quite a bit of traffic on the highway?

Miller: Yeah.

Hinton: So there was a lot of park use, even in 1939.

Miller: Yes, seems like there was—quite a bit.

Hinton: How did tourists seem to react to the CCCs?

Miller: I can't remember.

Hinton: There wasn't much interaction, then?

Miller: No. I can't remember ever having anything to do with tourists.

Hinton: None of them ever stopped on the switchbacks and wanted you to pose for a picture or anything like that?

Miller: I can't remember that. They probably took pictures of us—I imagine, when we was rolling them rocks. It used to be quite fun to roll them rocks down the hillsides.

Hinton: They would have had to have done some safety precautions on the road so you didn't smack the cars.

Miller: Oh, I'm sure. They must have had flagmen stop the cars—keep them off while we was rolling them. [pause] Well, that's about all I can remember.

Hinton: Well, that's pretty good after fifty years. Where was that rock quarry? Do you know exactly? Do you remember?

Miller: I know it was north of Springdale, but I can't remember exactly where.

Hinton: It wasn't inside the park, was it?

Miller: No, I think it was out of the park.

Hinton: Was it privately owned, one that they . . .

Miller: . . . leased from . . .

Hinton: . . . an individual?

Miller: Somebody else. I can't really remember, but I'm pretty sure it was out of the park.

Hinton: They'd send guys up on the top and tie ropes to them, and they'd blast the rock off the hillside?

Miller: Yeah. I believe they did do a lot of blasting. And how they got them down to where we was working them up I don't remember. They may have had small cats in there pulling them down.

Hinton: Was it a fairly significant fall from the side of the rock face to the pit where you were working the stone?

Miller: I can't really remember. All I can remember is the big flat place where we was breaking them up. I really can't remember exactly where they got the stones, but they had to be just above us there, somewhere on the ledges.

Hinton: Well I've seen pictures of them working the rock from the ledges on the quarry and breaking the slabs off and having them fall into the pit below.

Miller: Yeah.

Hinton: Did you have special tools for working the stones?

Miller: Yeah. Well, I can remember these little wedges—just small wedges, you know. We'd start little holes with either a chisel or a miner's hammer—you know, a pick. We'd just start a small hole in the rock, and then we'd start these small wedges in there—just a string of them—and just go along smacking each one of them until it finally just busts loose with a crack right down the wedge line, you know, and it busts loose.

Hinton: Did you have pre-prescribed sizes for the rock that you were working with?

Miller: Yes.

Hinton: So you'd measure?

Miller: [We would] get the right width there and start your wedges.

Hinton: Were there natural seams that you looked for?

Miller: No.

Hinton: You just created them, then?

Miller: You just got the right width and started these wedges, and they split it.

Hinton: After they broke off, you didn't do anything with it? You didn't do any designs?

Miller: No, that was all left to the rock masons. When they got it down to where they needed it, they broke it up in the sizes they wanted. I remember one time working on one great big long slab up there, and I forgot to put the rocks up underneath the one I was working on. I got my wedges all along on there and [I was] beating on them. And when it broke, it broke all of a sudden, and I wasn't ready for it, and [it] come down and landed on my toes—both feet. I couldn't move.

Hinton: You had to holler for help?

Miller: I hollered for help, and old Coffee Nerves came and, man, if he wasn't mad. He used some choice words. I guess he was afraid I was going to foul up his safety record or something.

Hinton: So they kept safety records?

Miller: Yeah.

Hinton: They were quite highly safety-conscious.

Miller: Yeah, you bet they were. I remember he cussed the hell out of me. But I didn't get hurt bad enough—my toes didn't get mashed bad enough that I even went to the doctor about them. But they turned black and blue.

Hinton: You didn't miss any work, then?

Miller: No. I didn't miss work. I wouldn't give old Coffee Nerves that satisfaction.

Hinton: They had a doctor in the camp, didn't they?

Miller: Yeah. They had a doctor. They even had a dentist come around every so often. The first dentist I ever went to in my life was in the CCs.

Hinton: Was he out of St. George, or in the army, or what?

Miller: He must have been in the army, but I can't remember for sure.

Hinton: Probably military. And he'd come in and give everybody a checkup?

Miller: Yes, he was there every so often. You made an appointment. If you had trouble, you got to see him.

Hinton: If you didn't have troubles, did he sign you up for a checkup?

Miller: No. I don't believe so. I think you had to have something wrong—a cavity or something bothering you.

Hinton: Do you remember any serious accidents during the year you were with the CCCs?

Miller: No. I sure don't. Little scrapes and such, like my mashed toe . . .

Hinton: Rocks falling on people working on the trails? Anything like that?

Miller: I can't remember of any.

Hinton: So indeed the safety record *was* pretty good.

Miller: I think it was, yes.

Hinton: Well, Leon, I appreciate your spending this time with me to talk about your experiences with the CCCs. It's probably good to get together, and maybe after reminiscing for a while, you might remember some more things.

Miller: Yeah. I hope I remember some of the guys [that] show up today.

Hinton: If you look at the registration list and see the names, it might help you recall some of the guys.

Miller: Yes. Might do.

Hinton: Thank you.

[End of interview]