

Leo Patterson
Zion National Park Oral History
CCC Reunion
29 September 1989

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Beth Martin: Beth Martin, interviewer, interviewing Leo Patterson, September the 29th, 1989, CCC Oral Histories. Where are you from, Leo?

Leo Patterson: Well, I was originally from Milford, Utah, when I was in the CCs, and I live now in Orem, Utah.

Beth Martin: Orem, Utah. When did you join the CCs?

Leo Patterson: It was in May in 1940, and I was discharged in probably the later part of September or October in 1940 to return to school.

Beth Martin: So you had not finished high school?

Leo Patterson: No. I went back and finished my senior year at high school and graduated in the spring of '41.

Beth Martin: And did you ever join the CCs again?

Leo Patterson: No. It was disbanded in 1941, I understand.

Beth Martin: Right after that.

Leo Patterson: And at that time in '41, I had accepted employment with the Union Pacific Railroad, which I had stayed with, and went into military service—was in the military service for about forty-two months during the great World War II.

Beth Martin: The big one?

Leo Patterson: Anyway, then I returned, and, with my seniority, I went back to work for the Union Pacific and completed a grand total of forty-one years of service with them, which I retired in 1981, in November, 1981.

Beth Martin: When you came to Zion, was this your very first time that you had been here or living in Southern Utah?

Leo Patterson: No. Prior to coming into the CCs—I would think in about 1937—the schools at Cedar City and St. George conducted an Easter pageant here in Zion's Park, and we had been here, and then I made one or two other trips here with a friend and took pictures all through Zion Park at that time.

Beth Martin: Did you take any, by any chance, of the CCC camps that were here?

Leo Patterson: No, not at that time.

Beth Martin: You just took the beauty—the grandeur of the park.

Patterson: Of the park.

Martin: Why did you join the CCCs?

Patterson: Well, just more or less to have something to do. I couldn't find another job for the summer program, and so I came in the CCs just to keep busy and keep working.

Martin: Did you need the money to go back to your parents?

Patterson: Yes. I was supporting my mother at that time.

Martin: And you received the thirty dollars, and how much of it went home?

Patterson: I can't recall just how much, but I think about half, fifteen or maybe even twenty of it went back home.

Martin: And how much did you get to keep to spend?

Patterson: About ten dollars.

Martin: For the entire month. One man sent everything back but two . . .

Patterson: Yes.

Martin: . . . and got by on two dollars—if you could imagine—a month.

Patterson: You could, and I think it was twenty and ten I kept, but then I won't say—or not brag—that I probably took some of that home on the weekends to my mother, too, so . . .

Martin: Well, it was needed more at home, and a dollar went a long, long way in that day.

Patterson: Yes, it did in those days, very much.

Martin: How many children were in your family? Was she a sole supporter?

Patterson: No. There was my mother and then a younger sister and I still at home when I was here in the Cs, and so I was helping support my mother and younger sister.

Martin: What type of work did you do while you were here?

Patterson: Well, I first came and went to basic and then working on the trails and so forth all up through the park.

Martin: Which trail particularly did you work at?

Patterson: Well most of them by the main part, and then we started—that was the year I think they started—the trail, Angel's Landing trail, and it was quite treacherous, so I asked to be relieved. And at that time, Top Sergeant Scipio Edwards put me as “dog robber,” they called it.

Martin: What's a dog robber?

Patterson: That was to wait on the meals of all of the officers in the mess for breakfast, dinner, and supper and also clean their quarters, and so forth, so I did this.

Martin: This is the officers' quarters or the other men's quarters?

Patterson: The officers' quarters.

Martin: The officers'. Now this Scipio, his name was what?

Patterson: Clayton Edwards.

Martin: Clayton Edwards.

Patterson: Nicknamed Scipio.

Martin: I've had a lot of the men talk about Clayton Edwards.

Patterson: He is a great guy, a wonderful personality, and he and I were pretty good buddies.

Martin: Now say again slowly, what did he call you? What was your title for that time?

Patterson: Dog robber.

Martin: Dog robber, that's because you cleaned up the scraps from the table.

Patterson: From the tables of the officers. A lot of them, they used to think that was a putdown, but to me, it was just still another job that I did and wanted to fulfill and do the best I could.

Martin: Did you do this the whole time that you were—?

Patterson: No I did this for maybe two to three months after a month or so on working on the trails, and then there was an opening in the kitchen as a cook, and I became a second cook with, at that time, Mess Sergeant Earl Mower and cooks Bill Wood and Louis Christensen, and so forth, and we put out the meals three times a day for all the men.

Martin: How many men? Were there over two hundred?

Patterson: Well, there was quite a lot of them. I don't recall just exactly how many.

Martin: Did the officers eat separately from the regular men?

Patterson: Yes. They had their own mess hall, or mess room in the kitchen.

Martin: Same kitchen?

Patterson: Well it was in the same building, but it was on a separate end all by their selves [sic].

Martin: But they ate their meals . . .

Patterson: They ate their meals separately from the enlisted men.

Martin: So then, how old were you then when you came into the CCC? If you hadn't finished high school, how old were you?

Patterson: I was nineteen.

Martin: You were just nineteen.

Patterson: Nineteen. Yes.

Martin: All right. Tell me a little bit, what was you issued [sic] when you first came into the camp?

Patterson: Oh, as near as I can recall, for summer, it was a one or two pair of suntan pants and shirt and underwear and shoes and socks, and that was about all we needed, I guess in the summertime here. They didn't give us any of the wool clothes, which they did for the winter months.

Martin: So you weren't ever here for the winter months, so you wasn't ever in need of being issued the winter clothing?

Patterson: No.

Martin: Tell me how a day went for you—your impressions of how a day is—you started, and as you went through the day.

Patterson: Well we'd start at reveille—get up and go stand reveille—and then come in.

Martin: Where did you stand this reveille?

Patterson: Well, it was just out south of the main barracks, and so forth, and then the mess hall was further up in the compound, and so forth. We'd go out and do a slight period of calisthenics and reveille, and so forth, but then some of us on special assignment, such as dog robber, then I would go and start to prepare the mess, and so forth, and after the officers when they got up and came over to the mess hall for breakfast.

Martin: Okay. Then after you got through working at the mess hall, how many hours were you in the mess hall? Now you've got to be there the three meals. Did you have some time in between these three meals to—?

Patterson: Yes. I would serve their breakfast, clean up the dishes and take them into the kitchen, and so forth, and go over and clean some of the quarters, go back and serve their noon meal and then go back and clean the rest of the quarters and then go back and serve them their supper.

Martin: So you still worked the full eight hours, regardless.

Patterson: Yes. I worked the full eight hours. Then when I went in the kitchen, we had eight hours on and eight hours off or a day off—twenty-four hours on and twenty-four hours off.

Martin: So there was another.

Patterson: So you worked actually about four days average a week and have two to three days off with two crews of cooks.

Martin: Okay. Before I go onto the next, tell me. Describe an average breakfast, lunch, and supper. What was served for breakfast?

Patterson: Well, it depended on, like the army menus, and so forth, as I can recall was a basic breakfast: eggs, bacon, or ham, or whatever the order of the day called for, and so forth. And then for lunch, it was usually meat, vegetables of some sort—I can't say ham or steak or what—and then at best would be a steak supper—sometimes, not all the time. Other times, it would be roast meat or roast pork or a variety of foods in that order.

Martin: Some of the men talked about sandwiches. Did you ever be involved in?

Patterson: They did serve sandwiches to a lot of them that were working on the trails, and so forth, and the cooks and so forth prepared the sandwiches, and then a truck or something took them up to the men working on the trails, and that, but then they would always be here for breakfast and back for supper.

Martin: What did you do on these off days in between this, every other day?

Patterson: Clean our barracks.

Martin: Did you have weekends off, or was this just a regimented—since you were serving meals, it was every other day?

Patterson: It was every other day, and so forth, to give you plenty of time, but you did work more than, say, eight hours when you was a cook on shift. You'd start probably approximately three o'clock in the morning, and you would get through approximately nine o'clock at night to make sure your kitchen was spick and span, clean, and raring to go, so that way you would have another twenty-four hours off. Most of the time we would—on our days that we stayed here at camp, we cleaned our barracks, including the ones of the non-coms or something that was on duty up on the trails, and so forth. We'd have to clean those, but then we could trade, and then we would have a three day weekend to go home.

Martin: Did you go home very often? Did you visit?

Patterson: Oh, in that time, I think maybe I went home three or maybe four times in four or five months.

Martin: What kind of transportation did you go on?

Patterson: In those days, you got on the road and stuck out your thumb and hitchhiked back and forth.

Martin: And that's how you got home and back?

Patterson: That's how I got a hundred miles home and a hundred miles or so back.

Martin: That's how far Milford is from Zion?

Patterson: Approximately.

Martin: Okay. Did you wash your own clothes? Did you have laundry?

Patterson: Yes. We had to keep our own clothes washed and that, and I think I did have a central wash deal part of the time, but . . .

Martin: How did you wash your clothes?

Patterson: Well, you did them on a board in a tub and washed them out, rinsed them out, and hung them up like you normally would.

Martin: On the clothesline, right?

Patterson: Yes. On the clothesline.

Martin: Your dryer was sunshine.

Patterson: Sunshine and air.

Martin: Solar dryer, right? What about your bathing facilities? What type of things did they have there?

Patterson: They had sufficient toilets for all of us and also shower facilities, and so forth.

Martin: Modern?

Patterson: Yes. They were modern.

Martin: For that time, they were very modern.

Patterson: Yes they were modern. They weren't all closed off and so forth, but then they were modern as far as hot and cold water.

Martin: What about discipline? Do you remember anything about having to be disciplined?

Patterson: I never, say, required any discipline. I might have irked an officer, one way or another at one time or another, which anybody would, but then, not as far as discipline. I think most of the officers knew they were dealing with civilian personnel more than they were military, and although we were classed as a military unit and CCCs, and so forth, under

government control, but I think they were pretty congenial and understood the facts and so forth of what went on.

Martin: Do you recall any horseplay, any tricks played on others, or any type of this type?

Patterson: Not in the CCs.

Martin: Not in the CCs!

Patterson: I will make a comment there that maybe some of them may not know. I say Scip Edwards was a great guy, and he'd come in on our days off in the kitchen and say, "Hey! It's time to clean the barracks," and I'd tell him, "If you want the barracks clean, go get the water and the mops, and you're gonna do it." And he'd tip our beds over, and we'd wrestle around for quite a while, and then he'd get up and stroll off and go get the water and the mops and bring them back, and then we'd have to clean the barracks.

Martin: Was he your superior?

Patterson: He was Top Sergeant. He had—all the non-coms and the men there answered to Scip, and he was a great guy.

Martin: How was your relationship with everybody on a whole, then, the officers and the supervisors?

Patterson: It was real good. It was real pleasant to say that you was associated and that with all of them.

Martin: Well, in that short of time, you probably was never assistant leader or anything like this. You was just normal, straight pay, thirty dollars a month.

Patterson: Well, when I went into cooking, I got thirty-six dollars a month, and top cooks, first cooks, and mess sergeant or more got what they call "sergeants' pay," or forty-five dollars a month.

Martin: I guess that helped at home, then, a lot.

Patterson: Yeah. Even the six dollars a month would help.

Martin: What about entertainment? What do you recall about entertainment during that period of time?

Patterson: They did have some deals that they would show in the rec hall or then at movies and that, that they would try and line up for us. And recreation—other than that, we had pool tables and could play pool, and so forth, at a PX. Other than that, why, you're just on your own.

Martin: What about ball games of any sorts?

Patterson: Yes. We did have. On some weekends and that, we'd line up and have inner camp ballgames.

Martin: Baseball?

Patterson: Baseball.

Martin: Basketball?

Patterson: I don't recall any, not in the summertime—basketball—but we did baseball.

Martin: What about boxing?

Patterson: I don't know that they ever had boxing. They might have.

Martin: Not while you were here?

Patterson: No. Not while I was here, that I know of.

Martin: Were classes offered while you were here that summer?

Patterson: No. They didn't have any classes as far as, say, educational classes or anything that way, only just seminars or something, you know.

Martin: You mention seminars. Did you have any lecturers come in on any basis at all?

Patterson: Not that I know of.

Martin: Not any type of educational lectures or nothing like that, even?

Patterson: No, nothing like that that I know of.

Martin: Did you ever have a chance to earn extra money?

Patterson: No. Not while I was here.

Martin: I've heard some pretty cute tales on those, too.

Patterson: Yes. I imagine.

Martin: How some of them got around earning an extra dollar or quarter, or whatever. Were you ever injured or sick while you were in the CCCs?

Patterson: No, ma'am. At the time, I was very healthy.

Martin: Did you know of anybody who got injured or hurt?

Patterson: Well, there was some of the men that I wasn't too well acquainted with I understand got hurt on the trails. Rocks fall on their hands, or something like that, but personally, nobody real close.

Martin: So you didn't have any real close association with any of that part. Was there a camp character?

Patterson: Not that I can recall, other than our top sergeant. [Laughs]

Martin: Scipio?

Patterson: He was a great guy.

Martin: Ok. Did I ask you if you had any of the tricks or jokes played on one another?

Patterson: Yes, you asked, and, oh, we used to pull one or two little things like these king snakes—throw one across the bed and wake somebody up in the middle of their sleep, or something. That, but not anything serious.

Martin: What color were the king snakes that were here?

Patterson: Oh, they were a black-and-white-striped-like. I'm not sure.

Martin: Were some of them terrified of them, or was it just another—?

Patterson: Well some of them didn't like them, but that wasn't the prank, you see, because they didn't like them, but just to let them know that we had one.

Martin: Just to let them know that you had one. Did you develop any long-lasting friendships while you were here? Kept in contact with anybody?

Patterson: Well not from the CCs per se that way, but the mess sergeant—Earl Mower—he married a woman that was a daughter of a fellow I worked with for a good number of years on the railroad. And then I got well acquainted with Earl—more so than here in the CCs—and we're still good friends to this day.

Martin: That's interesting. Have you seen the park change much since you was here in 1940?

Patterson: Well, we were here and took pictures, and that, and there was quite a few changes. A lot of the trails that we used to break the sandstone up with a hammer and spread it like sand in the trails and that, and now they have them asphalted [sic], and that's quite a change in that respect. They probably built a few more trails, but it was still originated—I would say, in concept in the feasibility of a lot of the trails—was in the CCs.

Martin: The very basic part of them. Do you remember, other than that, the other trail that you worked on the first few months?

Patterson: Not the names of the trails. That I've forgotten.

Martin: Well, can you describe, maybe, what part of the canyon?

Patterson: Well, a lot of them was around the springs in the main part of the canyon, the walks and the trails.

Martin: The Emerald Pool area, do you suppose?

Patterson: Yeah. Some of them in that area and other springs. A lot of the rockwork I think is still there that we installed during that period of time.

Martin: What kind of tools did you use in building these trails?

Patterson: Wheelbarrows, hammers, wedges, and chisels.

Martin: Shovel?

Patterson: And strong back.

Martin: And a strong back.

Patterson: What have you done? Oh, you've told me what you've done since you left the CCCs. Do you think that experience in the CCs helped you in the work, and how did it help you?

Martin: Well, it gave me a good concept of trying to achieve things, and if you set your mind— And what the CCs did accomplish on a lot of the roads throughout our state and so forth, you can still see the evidence today that it was a wonderful, say, backyard engineer that some of the engineers and that today can't even comprehend or equal what they accomplished, I think, at that time. I think this is what's helped me in my life—is to be determined. And I've had, ever since then, I might say, a theory that there's nothing I can't do if I set my mind to it. And I've tried to accomplish just that.

Patterson: Thank you. Thank you. Thank you very much. We really appreciate what you've told us.

[Interview ends.]