

George Platt
Zion National Park Oral History Project
CCC Reunion
September 30, 1989

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Don Graff: This is Don Graff. Today I'm interviewing George Platt. This is the thirtieth day of September, 1989. We're in the Nature Center, and it's about 9:30 right now. So, George, why don't we just start out? I assume you're a local from around here but maybe you could tell us where you're from and how it was you got interested in or what brought you into the three C's to begin with.

George Platt: Well, I'm from Richfield, Utah, and I went into the CCCs in the spring of 1935 with my brother Roland. He had been in the summer before and then came home for graduation from high school, and I joined up with him because we had a widowed mother that needed our assistance, and we didn't have any employment.

Don Graff: Were you in Richfield at that time?

George Platt: We were in Richfield at that time.

Don Graff: So you're originally from Richfield?

George Platt: It's been my home since I was ten years old.

Don Graff: Is that right? I see.

George Platt: And frankly, I've never made enough money to get out of there.

Don Graff: (Laughs) Now, who's older—you or Roland?

George Platt: Roland is thirteen months older than me.

Don Graff: Okay, so were you still in school when you—?

George Platt: I was still in school when I joined the CCCs. And we went to Salina, Utah, and were up the canyon that summer. And in the fall of the year—now that's 1935—we went to Mayfield. And we spent a whole year in Mayfield. I was working on Buck Sealy's gang with my brother Roland, and there was available a team of horses, and I asked if I couldn't get one of them to drive, and Buck made arrangements for me to get a team of horses. And after I had been driving the team for a while, one day he said to me, "George, I want you to take these four men and get down there and move those rocks off with that cat just above Mayfield." They had kind of rolled down off the hill into the bottom of the creek, and he wanted me to move the rocks off that road. And he says, "You take these four men, and this kid from Philadelphia wants to learn how to drive a team, so teach him how to drive a team and then you and Dawson Sellers can do some rock work around those culverts that are down there, but these other men [can] haul the rocks." So he turned these boys over to me. I said to him, "Buck, what do you expect me to do with a crew like that?" And he said, "I don't give a damn if you don't get a thing done. Just get them

out of my sight before I kill one of them.” Now they were various characters. Dawson Sellers was quite a talkative guy, and he got on Buck’s nerves. And the other boys were just a little bit on the demented side, I believe. One of them was an older fellow but not mature mentally, and he was a good hard worker. It was just a matter of getting them off themselves and they’d work like Trojans. And after a week, Buck says, “You’ve done more work for those four men than I have with a crew of thirty.” He says, “You’ve got your crew from now on.”

Well they called them Platt’s Idiots. [Laughs] I was stuck with them for a while, but I enjoyed working with them. They were good boys; they weren’t afraid to work, and it was just a matter of getting away from the rest of the guys where they were being teased. And after a period of time, there was an opportunity come up for a grease monkey on one of the cats and Buck seen to it that I got that opportunity. So I started driving cat part time and doing the grease monkey work. And we went up on the Skyline Drive, above Mayfield, south of Twelve Mile Flats, and worked out in there, cutting that road on through to Salina Canyon. We didn’t get all the way through there in the time we were up there, but I worked on the cat all that summer up there. And then when camp broke up, we were among the crew that went to Bryce Canyon. We got to Bryce Canyon in the fall of ’36. And after the camp moved down to Zion, in the fall, we came down here, and the rest of the time I was in the camp, I was here in Zion or at Bryce Canyon in the summer time.

Graff: How many stints did you put in then, finally? Did you go six months at a time, right? Were you in a full two years?

Platt: I stayed right in. I re-signed every new enlistment until the end of 1938. I took a discharge at the end of 1938.

Graff: Had you been in a full two years?

Platt: I’d been in nearly three years.

Graff: Nearly three years. Normally, there was a two-year limit. How did you get around it?

Platt: Well, I didn’t know anything about that, if there was such a thing.

Graff: And so they let you stay?

Platt: They never bothered me about reenlisting.

Graff: Different fellows I talked to, when their two years was up, they just told them they had to go.

Platt: Well, they didn’t to me.

Graff: Would it been because of your widowed mother, maybe?

Platt: Maybe it could have been because of that. There never seemed to be any problem there. Roland got in and out a couple of times. He left camp here.

Graff: But you were in straight—.

Platt: I stayed right in. I never had a break in all that time. So it was June in '35 to the last day of December in '38, so it was over three years.

Graff: Over three years.

Platt: A good three and a half years, a little better than that, I guess. But I worked here in Zion with John Excel on a rock crew. We broke a few rocks and were laying a bridge up the canyon here towards—what is this canyon?

Graff: Pine Creek Canyon.

Platt: I only worked there for a short time, and then I went to work in the kitchen.

Graff: Oh, yeah?

Platt: We had an opportunity—well, we took turns doing KP duty, and so we were assigned, there were five of us assigned to do KP duty. And we got talking to the cooks and first sergeant and finally the commanding officer, and we decided that, if they'd let us, we would stay on and do steady KP work, but the man in the outfit would have to give us two bits a month.

Graff: So you were the group that started that.

Platt: We were the group that started that.

Graff: Do you know the names of the other guys . . . ?

Platt: Well, I remember Whit Roundy was among the bunch. I could be mistaken on this. Forrest Hooten was in that group. My brother Roland was in that group, and . . .

Graff: That's four of you.

Platt: . . . Wayne Henderson, I believe, was in that group. I'm not sure. I can't remember all who were in the first of it. But that would probably be a pretty good guess. And the man agreed to that. Of course, it had to be done on conditions that the enlisted men who were paying the bill agreed to it. And so they agreed to it.

Graff: So what was the total bill, then?

Platt: The commanding officer took two bits out of their paycheck every month and divided that among the five of us.

Graff: Is that right?

Platt: I think there were five of us. Whatever it amounted to, we got it.

Graff: About what was that?

Platt: Well, I think the first month it come out to be around eight dollars each. But it got down to six, and then the company's strength went down, and we were practically working for nothing, but that was in the bargain.

Graff: Right.

Platt: So we just kept on working. But about that time, when the company's strength went down, we lost a lot of our cooks, and they were looking for new cooks. Of course, among the KPs was KP pusher and he was a student cook. And so if we wanted to be a student cook we had to be the KP pusher. And they offered us an opportunity to go in as student cooks, but we lost this money if we did.

Graff: Yeah.

Platt: We lost this money if we went into student cooks. Well, I think Roland and I were the only ones—there might've been one other among that group—that decided to go on and be student cooks. I remember I went in, and right shortly after that, I was sent up to Bryce with Jack Seaton to cook for a group of bug timber boys that were sent up there to mark bug timber. We went in there that spring. I guess that would have been the spring of '37. There was a lot of snow in there they'd had to plow. I remember Max Peterson telling about going in there and plowing the trail through that snow, and I guess the walls of those snow banks were eight feet high. I remember while we were up there we couldn't take a bath because we couldn't get water into the shower and the lavatory. Actually, we tunneled between the mess hall and the barracks. We were living in the recreation hall or company office up there, and we tunneled through the snow to get back and forth to that. But you could walk right over the roofs of the buildings, right over the roofs. There's a little break under the eaves, but you could step over it, walk right up over the roofs from the top of the snow. And we were there for a week, and none of us had had a bath, and we talked Captain Whitney into bringing us up a No. 3 tub so we could have a bath. And we'd heat water in the kitchen on the stove, and they'd go out in the snow bank and have their bath.

Graff: Quite a thing.

Platt: Yes, it was kind of fun to have that happen. Took us back to the days when we used to bathe as kids in the No. 3 tubs.

Graff: Sure.

Platt: But after the main camp come up—of course, Jack Seaton left that year and I only stayed with him for a short time—they sent Clinton Glad up to cook. They took him in off their Johnny rock crew, I believe, and gave him leader training and put him in as a head cook. He was a good cook. He taught me a lot about cooking. I was there with him until main camp came up, and then they sent me to Cedar Breaks to cook for that outfit over there.

John Excel was sent over with that crew, but he only stayed a state short time, and they sent Marion Willis over. I remember trying to get somebody to do KP work for me because I didn't want to have to change KPs every day; I wanted somebody to get in and help me with my work and do the work without having to be told everything. Finally got one kid persuaded that if I'd let him go when somebody come that wanted the job, he'd come in and work for me. So he did, and that was the agreement. Well, after a time, they sent some more men over, and he found a man who wanted to do it, and so he brought him in, and I said, "Well, that's what we agreed to, so just go on and get ready, and go to work." And he left the young feller there, and I don't even remember who the kid was. I could probably guess—if I could look in my journals, I could tell you.

But I went to see Marian at the time—Marian Willis—and couldn't find him, and I had to get back in there and get my work taken care of and show this kid what I wanted him to do. I got busy, and it come time for Marian to take his men to work, and he found out that I had changed KPs on him without consulting. Oh, he was mad! He came in there, "My good golly sakes alive! Blue blazes and purple flowers! What do you think this is, anyhow? Who's a-running this place, you or me?" And he really laid it on me. And I got a little tired of that, and so when he got through, I said, "Well, Marian, I guess there's something we better get straight. You're not running this place. I am! And if I want to keep that whole damn crew in here, I'll do it! And there ain't a thing you can do about it!"

I had to follow him out to the truck to tell him that because he wasn't standing still for it. Course, all of his men heard what I told him, so he was just embarrassed to death, and he couldn't put up with that. So I got a bad report sent in on me back to Captain Whitney in Bryce. And it wasn't long until they sent Clinton Glad over to take my place. And I found out I had made Assistant Leader in the time that I had been over to Cedar Breaks. Well, when I got back to Bryce, I went in to see the Captain. I said, "I guess you got a bad report on me." And he said, "Yeah, I'd like to hear what you have to say about it." And I said, "Well." I told him just exactly what had happened and "Good for you!" he said. And he hit the desk with his old fist. He says, "These damn foremen think they're running this place but they're not! I am!" And he says, "You did exactly what I told you to do." I was grateful for Captain Whitney. He was always a great support.

Graff: Just so I understand this, wasn't the army over feeding the men, so they were actually running the kitchens, and it wasn't the . . .

Platt: The army was running the whole thing. But if they wanted to assign the men to do something besides go out and do work on the projects, they did. They run the thing. They were in command. But that's what we were here for was to do service for our country and conservation and one thing and another.

I'd like to say this. I think that the CCC program was a great conservative effort on the part of our federal government. A lot of our natural resources were conserved through the efforts of the CCC. But more important than that, I think, was the conservation of the young manpower of America. I think that we did more for the young manpower of America in the operation of the CCC than any other thing that had ever happened because

some of those boys we got out here from back east couldn't read or write. They had never been to school. And if they had, they hadn't gone very far in it. And the educational system that was set up for us in CCC was a marvelous thing. I don't want to pass this up—I graduated from high school with projects, work, studies that I took in CCC under my educational advisor while I was at Mayfield. I got credit—high school credit—for those studies, and I graduated from high school, and they allowed me to go home and graduate with my own high school class. So I graduated with my own class out of Richfield High School when I should have done, and I've always been kind of proud of the fact that I was one of the first two men in the state of Utah to get high school graduation credit, to graduate from high school from credit I got in CCC.

Graff: Who was the other man?

Platt: I don't know. He was someone from up north.

Graff: But you were the first two?

Platt: I never knew . . .

Graff: Let me ask you this while we're on this part of it. Obviously, if you weren't out of school, you weren't seventeen years old. It wasn't . . .

Platt: I was eighteen when I went into the CCC.

Graff: Were you eighteen?

Platt: Yes.

Graff: So you were . . . but you just hadn't finished school yet.

Platt: I was a year behind most of those my age in school.

Graff: I see. So you actually were . . .

Platt: I was eighteen. I had turned eighteen in February, and I went into the CCC in June.

Graff: I see. So there was no problem with the age limit there, then?

Platt: No. Well, to go on, after I came back to Bryce, Captain Whitney left us shortly after that. I don't remember just when he left. I've always had great respect for that man. He had the dignity and respect as an officer of the United States Army is entitled to, I think. I've always had a lot of respect for him.

Graff: Do you know what his full name was?

Platt: Chauncey B. Whitney.

Graff: Chauncey B. Whitney. Now this was in the camp across the river?

Platt: This was in the Bridge Mountain Camp.

Graff: Camp on the east side of the river. Yeah.

Platt: Bridge Mountain Camp NP-4 and at Bryce Canyon.

Graff: When you were here, was the other camp over on this side of the river?

Platt: Yes. There was another camp there.

Graff: The whole time or . . . ?

Platt: All the time I was here there was a camp on both sides of the river.

Graff: Okay.

Platt: Now, I never had too much dealing with them because, I guess, mainly, because I was in the kitchen and didn't have much opportunity to run into them unless I met them in town or something like that. But I understand most of them were from out of state. There were a few probably from in state, but we were mostly Utah boys in the NP-4 regiment.

Well, I was sent down here to get things ready for the camp to move down. We got a new commanding officer, and his name was Hazard—I can't remember his first name. He was a lieutenant when he came to us. The first orders I got from him up to Bryce was to serve him his breakfast in bed, and I wouldn't do it. And his orderly came in and wanted to fix his breakfast for him, and I said, "Well, I don't care what you do as long as you stay out of my way." Right after breakfast was over, we got orders to have all the cooks meet with the commanding officer in the mess hall. And I thought [for] sure I was going to get chewed out for that, but he never mentioned it. [Laughs]

Graff: What was his name again?

Platt: Hazard.

Graff: Do you remember . . .

Platt: He was a . . .

Graff: Full name?

Platt: I don't remember his first name.

Graff: And he replaced Whitney, then?

Platt: I believe he replaced Whitney. There might have been another one between them, but he came in about the last year that I was in. He was a cavalry officer. He wore his high cavalry boots with the trousers that flapped out on the side and carried a little quirt with him, and he looked and acted tough. He was little, but he looked tough, and most of the boys were a little bit scared of him. But after my first interview with him—that meeting

in the kitchen—I felt a little bit better about him. He promised us that he was going to come down here to Zion and fix up our camp. He was going to put some porcelain toilets in the latrine, and he was going to fix up the showers, and he was going to fix up the mess hall, and he was going to do this and that and the other. We kind of took it with a grain of salt because we'd been made promises before. We didn't think much would come of it. But, you know, he did everything he promised us he was going to do. When the time come to come down here, he sent me down and he says, "You go down and get the camp ready. There's a spike camp down there, but go down and see things are ready, and have dinner ready for us when we get there." So I came down, and I had to hook up a water heater—water heat booster—to the heat that had come from the regular stoves. And all I had to do was take a union and put it together and turn the water on, and it went through that booster and gave us the extra water we needed. Well, when he got down here, why, we had dinner ready for him, and right away he started on this project. And we started getting new porcelain toilets in the latrine.

Graff: What did you have before?

Platt: Just those old board shacks like the old outhouse on the hill.

Graff: Well now, let's just hold up a second because this was something that I didn't follow up yesterday, but Brothers, the guy that built the camp, said they had flush toilets when he built it. Now, were these flush toilets that you're remembering, or . . . ?

Platt: I don't remember any flush toilets before this. I don't remember any flush toilets before this.

Graff: Wonder what . . .

Platt: I could be mistaken on what we had there. But as I remember, it was just like the old outhouse.

Graff: Just outhouse. Yeah.

Platt: And smelly and bad.

Graff: Well, sure.

Platt: And then they put the flush toilets in and plumbed them and so forth. And then he started fixing up the kitchen, and when he come to the kitchen, he says, "Platt," he says, "We've got to have a plumber, and we can't take the one we got out on the park service for the park service; we've got to furnish our own." So he says, "You're our plumber." And I says, "I don't know anything about plumbing." He says, "Didn't you hook up this hot water when you come down here?" I said, "Yeah," and told him what I'd done. He said, "You're our plumber." He says, "You can have any man you want except men that are assigned to the park service to help you." So I said, "Well, you get me Joe Asay." Now, Joe Asay had just come into camp as a new recruit. He was from Monroe, Utah. And he had volunteered to help me the night we cleaned up the mess hall before the company come down. He's the only volunteer I got. Well, I did finally get a second one, and it was

kind of funny after they volunteered. I said, “You two boys can take off and go to town or do whatever you want to. You’ve got the rest of the day off. Just be here tonight at eight o’clock.” And so, of course, the rest of the boys were upset that they hadn’t volunteered. But Joe was a good worker, and I found him good and congenial to get along with. So I asked the lieutenant to get Joe Asay for me. And Joe tells me this: he said he “came out to line up, and after he dismissed all the rest of the men, I was the only one standing there, and he walked up to me, and he said, ‘Joe Asay?’

‘Yes, sir.’

‘Are you a plumber?’

‘No sir.’

‘Joe Asay?’

‘Yes, sir.’

‘You’re a plumber!’

‘Yes, sir.’”

And that’s the way it mounted and went. I guess Joe Asay became a licensed plumber in the state of Utah quicker than any man I’ve ever known. But he became a plumber.

Graff: Started it right here?

Platt: He started it right here in Zion’s Canyon, and he worked with me. And after we were through, had the job well done—I didn’t have to cook during this time; I just had to take care of that—after it was all done—he was captain now—and he said, “Now you boys have a fifteen-day furlough coming any time you want it.” Now, can you imagine that? You never got a fifteen-day furlough in the CCC; you got a *six*-day furlough after six months accrued at the rate of one day a month.

Graff: Yeah.

Platt: And if you didn’t take it after six months you lost it. “Fifteen-day furlough coming any time you want it”! And I said, “Well, Captain, if it’s all right with you, I’d like to take my fifteen-day furlough in connection with—conjunction with—my six-day furlough, which I have coming. And if you’d throw in a couple extra weekends, I could leave such and such a day, and be gone all the month of December and take a discharge at the end of it. I want to go on a mission for the Church.” And he says, “So be it.” I learned later that Joe Asay took his fifteen-day furlough about the time I did, and when he came back to camp, he was walking into the office, and Captain Hazard was just walking out. He’d been transferred to Fort Douglas or somewhere else, and his adjutant was taking over. I don’t remember who the adjutant was at that time, but Hazard turned to his adjutant, and he says, as he seen Joe come in, he says, “This man’s got a fifteen-day furlough coming. You see to it that he gets it.” Joe says, “I turned right around and took another fifteen-day furlough and went home.” So he hadn’t been to camp in three months and he’d been home for a month. But after he came back to camp, he had a pretty good deal, too. I understand he was put on a crew that was sent over to Cedar City to advertise on the radio—music and so forth—with programs that the CCC produced every week over there. Joe had a great experience in camp. He didn’t spend much time working here. He was always over to Cedar City on the radio. But I left on the last day of December.

Graff: So did you go on your mission then?

Platt: I went home and was called on a mission. I left for a mission to the Western states. I entered the mission field on the 24th of February, 1939.

Graff: Had you been able to save enough money in the Cs to finance it?

Platt: No, I hadn't because Mother had . . .

Graff: Had needed the money.

Platt: Mother had used all of my money that I had sent home during that time.

Graff: How many other kids were there in your family?

Platt: We had five brothers and sisters home when my brother and I went into the CCC.

Graff: They were younger than you?

Platt: And only one of them was a teenager.

Graff: So she needed the money that you were sending home.

Platt: Our sister was a year and a half younger than me, and she was a teenager, and the rest of them were younger than that. So, Mother did need our support, and she used it. Well, in the interim, she got married again. Dad told her before he died that he didn't want her going through life alone, and she did marry again. And after a time, she was able to resell—or reclaim—the old farm at the mountain meadows. We had sold the meadows to a man by the name of Forsyth, and he had defaulted during the Depression, and for some reason—whether it was in the contract or not, I don't know—but she couldn't claim that again for the ten years after we left there. So it was '37 before she was able to get that cleared up and she re-sold it for a lot less than what it had been originally sold for. But she had little money of her own, and she went and bought a home in Richfield to rent. She rented that for twenty-five dollars a month, and that kept me on a mission. So I filled my mission on the money that came from that.

Graff: Let me ask you this. It seems like in this camp that generally it was a lot of young locals, state, at least from Utah, mostly Utah.

Platt: Yes. In our camp it was.

Graff: Which we'd assume that the majority of you were LDS, then?

Platt: I think so.

Graff: And yet, obviously, it's obvious from the pictures and the stories and everything that kids getting away from home, of course, they got a little wild and then went to smoking and drinking, a lot of them. Obviously, if you went on a mission, you must have maintained your standards while you were in the C's. How did you find—was there any conflict

there among the boys if you wanted to maintain the standards of the Church and not drink and smoke among the others who were?

Platt: I really didn't notice too much about that. But let me say this about myself. I started smoking while I was still in Mayfield, and I suppose I had the most unique reason for smoking of anybody that ever started smoking. My dad had told me not to smoke. He says, "If you can't find any better reason than me for not smoking, that's a good enough reason." My dad died of cancer on his lip, which was a result of smoking. That was a good reason for not smoking. But while I was in Mayfield, I was assigned with an Evan Maxfield, who was one of the truck drivers up there, to go to Ephraim and pick up a load of hay—baled hay—and haul it to Twelve Mile Flats and put it in the loft of the ranger station in the barn. And so, in doing that, I found myself contacting [sic] hay fever, which was the reason I went in the CCC in the first place, because I couldn't work on the farm.

Graff: Couldn't work on the farm.

Platt: I had to get out away from the farm. And that was the reason I went in the CCC in the first place. But I had hay fever so bad that I could hardly breathe. And we finally got that hay loaded and went up to Twelve Mile Flats, and I worked on the truck again at the depot in Ephraim so that I was out in the air, and he worked in the boxcar.

Graff: So you were loading it onto it.

Platt: So he was loading off of there onto the truck. So I had the advantage there, and he was good enough to take the worst end of it. When we got up there, I couldn't work up in the barn, but by throwing it off the truck up to him, I was still in a lot of trouble. I was having quite a struggle with hay fever, and he says, "Well, why don't you just take a drag on this cigarette?" He says, "That'll help you." And I said, "No, I don't want it," and finally got down, went over to the tap, stripped off to the waist, and washed myself down—and this happened a couple of times—from head to waist, and went back to work for a little while. But I still was having a lot of trouble with it. Finally, he persuaded me to take a drag on this cigarette. "You don't have to inhale it—just take it into your mouth and then exhale it through your nose." And I did. You know, for some reason, I guess the smoke coated those membranes to where I could finish the job, and it worked out pretty good. So after that, when I'd get a touch of hay fever, I'd bum a puff on somebody's cigarette. And then it got to where—"If you want to smoke, buy your own."

Graff: Sure.

Platt: And so I started packing my own.

[Break to turn over tape.]

Graff: Okay it's ready.

Platt: Well, one thing after another, I got in the habit of smoking, and I was smoking quite regular when I came down here. But one day I got to thinking, "This isn't what I want out of life. I know a society that beats this. I don't have to do this to have fun. I can go to a

dance and have fun sober just as much as I can drunk. There's no need of my carrying on this way." I just made up my mind I was going to quit smoking. And I quit. But I put my tobacco in my pocket with the tag hanging out, and I quit. And I was quit for months before one of my friends said to me, "George, have you quit smoking?" and I admitted to him that I had. I said to him, "I haven't had a cigarette for over a month." It seemed to me after that that every man in that camp come in front of me to smoke and blow their smoke right in my face. It was irritating and hard to deal with. I put up with it. I had made up my mind, and that's what I stayed with. And it was only a short time after that that I was home, and my mother told me that she was in a position to send me on a mission. So I concluded that when you're ready, the Lord will open a way for you to do what He wants you to do.

Graff: Sure. I guess that's what I was trying to get at, though, there were kids that—say, they wanted to go on a mission, or whatever. Was there pressure from the other kids to go to the dances and get drunk and this kind of thing?

Platt: I never had any that way. In fact, the boys—when they found out I quit—they admired me.

Graff: Yeah.

Platt: I actually had better support and more compliments and encouragement from my commanding officers and those that I was working with here in camp to go on that mission than I got from my bishop.

Graff: Is that right?

Platt: I actually did. Too bad to have to say that, but that's the way I feel about it.

Graff: That's some credit to the camp.

Platt: The people in the camp were very patronizing to my desire to go on a mission.

Graff: That's great.

Platt: I will say this, that while I was here in Zion, I got engaged to one of the girls in Springdale, and when I left on my mission she was wearing my diamond.

Graff: Is that right, now?

Platt: She was the daughter of John Excel. When I came home from my mission she was my sister-in-law.

Graff: Is that right?

Platt: And that was all right. She's been a good wife for my brother. [Laughs] I had to put that in, I guess.

Graff: Yeah, that is kind of unusual.

Platt: Yeah, she's been a good wife for my brother and they've raised a good family. But I've had a good life, too, for sure.

Graff: Sure. Let me ask you this. Did your experience in the three C's—did it help you on your mission? Did it help you in later life and in your career? Did you feel like you gained something?

Platt: I have never had any experience in my life since I left the CCC that I can't put a direct trace of some kind or another back to an experience I had in the CCC.

Graff: Yeah.

Platt: In the mission field, my mission president's wife frequently said to me, "I never worry about your companion getting the right food. I know that you'll feed him properly. I never worry." And I had a companion that she worried about a lot.

Graff: He wouldn't eat very good.

Platt: He was skinny as a rail, and, though he ate good, he never put on any weight. She was worried about him.

Graff: Sure.

Platt: He had a wife he'd left at home and he was kind of homesick for that, and so I was put with him, but they never worried about him at all as long as I had him. And I thought that was a pretty good compliment. But as I came home from my mission, I went into school. Well, I went to work in the hotel in Richfield for the summer, and then that's when I met my wife. Then I went to school in Ogden, [Utah], and I took two courses in trade school up there at Weber, one in machine shop and one in welding. They were kind of related to what I had done earlier in the CCC, and I've always had a mechanical mind. I wanted to get into something like that. I got an assignment to go work out to Hill Field. The same day I was to report out to Hill Field, I got my draft papers. I went into the service, and they sent me to Chesterfield, Texas, where, after taking an aptitude test, they put me on the list to go to Air Craft Mechanic School. I graduated from Spartan School of Aeronautics there in Tulsa, Oklahoma with good credit, and then I went to a specialist school in liquid-cooled engines in Indianapolis, Indiana. Then they attached me to an outfit in Pendleton, Oregon that didn't have any more use for a mechanic than anything under the sun, but they were sure hard up for cooks. And so I went in to the old man one day and told him how much experience I'd had cooking and that he needed some help. He agreed with me, and so he sent me into the kitchen. Well, for two years I worked for that old man as a buck private. There was no way he could give me a rating as a cook when I was classified as a mechanic.

Graff: Yeah.

Platt: There's no way he could give me a mechanic's rating when I was not working as a mechanic. So there I was. I was getting along all right with the situation, but after two years it got kind of old. One day, a few things happened and I got a chance to tell the old

man off, and, boy I told him. I never minced any words with him; I just told him where to bury his cabbage, and he had just failed to pass an IG inspection, and I knew it was him that was in trouble, not me. And he come to me for answers to some questions, and I had skirted them and laid it right where it belonged: on top of his shoulders. I said, “You wouldn’t dare take this outfit overseas in the shape you got it in. Your life wouldn’t be worth a plug nickel!”

I noted in my journal four days later that he issued carbine rifles to every man in his outfit except his cooks. I’ve often wondered (laughs) what influence that I had had on that decision. Then I’ve often wondered—and I’d still like to know the answer to this—when we got down to Oklahoma City, he finally issued us carbine rifles and sent us out to Fort Sill for rifle practice. The old sergeant laid me down in a prone position at two hundred yards and said “Hit that target.” I shot, and the guy in the pit signaled “Maggie’s drawers.” I’d missed the whole target. And so he gave me a lecture and I pulled another shot off, and “Maggie’s drawers.” The second time that happened, I said, “Sergeant, there’s either something wrong with this gun or there’s something wrong with that guy’s eyes, ’cause I hit that target right dead center.” He took the rifle from me and looked it over and says, “There’s nothing wrong with this,” and he gave me another lecture, told me to shoot the third round. And I did, and after that “Maggie’s drawers,” he said to the guy in the pit, “Get that target down, and examine it this time.” He brought her down and took a long time examining it. Finally he rounded up, put the little patch right over the center of that target—POP—right back over the center of the target.

Graff: He didn’t . . .

Platt: All three of those shots had gone right through that bull’s-eye. He says, “That’s enough for you. Give me the rest of your ammunition.” I had five rounds. I wondered if the old man ever seen that report. But I got along all right with him after that. They done everything that they could to make my life easy for me and help me to accomplish what needed to be accomplished. I was in the service to win that cock-eyed war for my country, and I had a lot of opportunity to help some of the boys that were having a struggle with being there.

Graff: Sure.

Platt: We had a little Mexican with us that kept running away and going home. They’d bring him back and stick him in the guard house for a couple of weeks, and then he’d go home again. They finally turned him over to us, and I sat down with him one day and give him a talking too. I said, “We’d like to go home just as bad as you. Let’s get this war over and get it done, and you’d just as well stay here and make life a little pleasant for yourself and do the job. It’s got to be done. Get this war over so we can go home.” He turned out to be one of our best little cooks. He was a good man; he went overseas with us.

Graff: So did you cook overseas, then?

Platt: Oh, yes. I went overseas and cooked for them over there. When the war was over, the group commander sent for me to come and cook for him; they was going to make an

officer's club, and they wanted to have their own mess hall, and they wanted me to come cook for them. I didn't want to do it, so I told the Lieutenant so, and I said, "If you can find any other man in the group that'll do it, why, take him 'cause I don't want to. And if you can't find anybody, come back, and I'll go and do it." So he came back the next day and he says, "The old man wants you to go on and do that." So I had him get the baker out of the headquarter squadron and [we] cooked a few meals for the old man. But my number came up way before it should have done to come home. And they came up one day and said, "Your plane's waiting for you." "What do you mean?"

"There are places left there on the plane. Do you want to go or don't you? Don't argue with me," he said. "We'll check in your stuff. You just grab what you want and take off." They hauled me in the Jeep to the plane, and I was on my way home *months* before I should've been. I come home the most outranked man in the army. I mean, there were staff sergeants and there were master sergeants and there were deck sergeants and I was a buck sergeant then. I came home the most outranked man in the bunch. But all of this is a result of what I learned in the CCC.

Graff: But wouldn't you say this, I mean, yeah, you learned your cooking here, provided, you know, you got to be a cook; that probably was better than . . .

Platt: Well, the most important part, I think, is learning to be a leader.

Graff: Yeah.

Platt: Learning to be a leader. I remember a time, over here in this camp when one of the boys came down to cook's barracks and was telling me about something that was going on up in one of the other barracks, and I says, "Well, what are you doing about it?" And he says, "Well, I want you to see it. Come on up." So as I walked back to the kitchen, I went that way, and there were a couple of kids in there trying to practice sodomy. I just looked at the guys with disgust and I says, "Is this what you want to be known as in this camp? Is this the kind of society that you want to be classified with? Now what are you going to do about it?" Well they pulled them apart and I persuaded one of them to go make a report to the officer. I just went with him. I didn't say anything. But I went with him. The report was made and they were taken down to St. George and locked up for a day or two, I don't know how long. I don't think they were discharged because of it—I don't remember—don't know what discipline they had. But I couldn't see having that kind of activity going on in the camp where I had to live. I think the most important thing that I learned out at the CCC was to be a leader, to stand up, to stand up and be heard, to say my piece, to learn the ropes and then how to take them.

I think one of the greatest experiences I had in the CCC was working with my brother Roland over in Mayfield. Our commanding officer confined us to camp until noon every Saturday. We wanted to be home to help our mother, and we couldn't. By the time we get home Saturday afternoon the day was shot. Why, by the time you're getting through helping her, you've got to leave early enough Sunday to come home. We didn't work on Sunday anyway. So you've got to leave Sunday early enough to get back to camp for Monday morning. We just weren't able to do anything. So he and I and another fellow sit down and wrote a letter, and we didn't know where to send it, so it wound up being

addressed to the commanding general of the CCC in Washington, D.C. And it was only a short time before it went back into the hands of one of the inspectors. Well, that letter was supposed to have a signature written on the camp on it. Roland had been a scribe, and he had signed it and handed it to this other kid, and he said he'd get the other signatures and mail it, and he just took it and mailed it. Boy, that irritated both Roland and I that he did a thing like that. But, anyway, the inspector got Roland down there and started questioning. Roland said, "Where's the other signatures to go with this letter?" And he didn't deny writing it. And he says, "Well, who else was involved?" So he involved him, and since they got him there, he involved me, and I got in there and listened to what was going on, and Roland was standing up toe to toe to those officers, hitting blow for blow everything they were throwing at him. And they were accusing him of treason, inciting a riot, and all kinds of things, you know, just everything under the sun that was out of the way. Roland wouldn't stand for it. He says— Then finally the CO started quoting him the articles of war. Roland says, "Now, wait here just a damn minute!" He says, "You're a soldier, and you are subject to the articles of war." But I'm not; I'm a civilian, and don't you forget it!" And that kind of got the inspector's attention, and he stood back and kind of listened. He finally got him to go get the articles of our enlistment, and the old man says, "You see what it says?"

Roland said, "Yeah, I see what it says, and it doesn't say a damn thing about what you said. It says you have a right, in case of an emergency, to keep us here all weekend if you need to. But you don't have a right to keep us here every Saturday until noon when we're through Friday night. We're entitled to go." And he says, "And I intend to go." And he says, "And all I've done in this letter is ask for some questions and answers." And he said, "I'm going to get those answers. If you can't give them to me I'll go somewhere where I can get them. But I'm going to get them answered." The old inspector, he kind of got with Roland—he laid on the thing—and then Roland turned to him and said, "Sir," he said, "I've got a widowed mother at home that expects me to come when I can and help her out. She's got five little children there, and she don't have any help to do anything except when my brother and I go home and help her out on the weekends." And he says, "I don't intend to stay here when I should be there helping my mother. That's why I come to this camp—so I can be close enough to go home and give her some help." And he got to his heart. He got to his heart.

I learned a lot in just standing there keeping my mouth shut and listening. I learned a lot about military procedure and discipline and everything else. He said, "Son," he said, "You're going to have your weekend." He turns to the CO and says, "And that is an order, sir. You'll see to it that they do have their weekend." Roland says, "I don't object to staying here when it's my turn. I'll take my turn doing night guard or KP or be here for the nucleus of a crew if you need them. I'll take my turn, but I do object to being here every weekend so that I can't get home to help my widowed mother."

Graff: Sure.

Platt: Boy, he got some respect from him. And then the inspector said, "Now, boys," he said, "you've embarrassed every commanding officer from Washington, D.C. right down to

here.” And he says, “There’s no need to do that.” He says, “What do you think we come out here for?” and he gave us schooling on military procedure.

Graff: Sure.

Platt: He says, “If you tell me about it, and I don’t do something about it, next month there will be another, and it won’t be me; it’ll be another. We never send the same one twice in a row.” And he says, “Somewhere along the line, they’re going to get the message up there, and they’re going to see to it that your problem’s taken care of.” So I learned a lot. And it was not long after that that we decided that the grub was being stolen from us. We had good reason to think that the mess sergeant and one of the cooks was taking choice food to town and either giving it to their families or selling it to girls for their favors, so we staged a grub strike. The company wanted to do that, and we got involved in it. Roland and I stood up and said, “Now look, if you’re going to do this, you’re going to do it our way, or we’re not going to have any part of it.” We told them how to go about it . . . *because* of what we’d been told there. And we appointed a young man to be our spokesman. We didn’t want to be in the limelight at all. We’ve already done our part; just keep us in the background because then they’ve got a reason to look at us for [sic] troublemakers. But keep us in the background, and appoint you a leader, and go in there and present them with a problem, and give them something for ammunition use. So we decided that three men every meal stationed in different places in the mess hall would make a list of everything that was on their table that they ate—that they had to eat—that was there available, including salt and pepper, sugar, and everything. So we went there armed with a good armload of material, and one of the big complaints was butter—lack of butter. Well, the old mess sergeant, when we got him over there, he said, “Why, sir, I can show you on the menus where they’ve been getting butter every meal.” I listened to that comment, and I said, “Sir,” I said, “Sergeant, you might show it on the menu, but it hasn’t been on the table.” Then our spokesman handed the inspector one of his lists, and he said, “I’d like you to look at this list; its food that we’ve been eating for the last three weeks.” He says, “There’s one or two particular menus I’d like you to note.” He says, “Note the amount of hominy consistently through here. But here’s one: carrots served five different ways on one menu, one meal?” He says, “Sir, I admire—we admire—the ability of our cooks to prepare carrots in so many different ways, but *five* ways on *one* menu? How ridiculous can you be?” And it was; it was there: carrot pudding, baked carrots, boiled carrots . . . I don’t remember how all—there was five different ways they had carrots—carrot salad, carrot and raisin salad—on that menu—and carrot cake, I guess. [Laughs] But anyway, when we were through, the inspector complimented us on the way we’d handled it. He says, “We’ve had so many grub strikes throughout the nation in the CCC, and they broke up furniture, and they broke up dishes and they hurt people, and they destroyed property, and there’s nothing we could do but let them pay for it. Nothing we can do but let them pay for it.” And he says, “I admire the way you’ve handled this.” And he says, “I promise you there’ll be an improvement in the chairs. He turned on the CO—the same old CO—and he says, “And that’s an order, sir; you can see to it.” Well, the stealing stopped, I think. [Laughs] But I learned a lot in my experiences. I learned how to handle a cat, I learned how to handle men, and I learned how to handle food. And we served some mighty good meals. I think we have a menu that we prepared

for Thanksgiving up to Bryce Canyon one year that was just as good a menu as you could find anywhere.

Graff: Sure.

Platt: In fact, the lieutenant and I felt so sorry for him—our mess officer was so pleased with that meal—that he wanted the captain to have some of it. We prepared chicken, I think, not turkey, but chicken. I can't remember, but there was a little of it left, and the captain hadn't been there for dinner; he'd been out fishing with his friends. And so the next morning, this lieutenant came in and picked up this platter of chicken and took it in and set it on Captain Whitney's desk or table. Well, his wife was there, and he had his friends and their wives were there, and the foreman was setting at a table right across the aisle from him in the same area, and he'd had to parade through the men's mess hall to get into there with that. And Captain said, "Well, what's this?" And he told him, and he says, "There's a man out there getting this?" "No sir," he says, "this is all there was left, and we wanted you to have a taste of it." And he says, "Take it back. We eat what the men eat." And that's the thing I liked about Captain Whitney—he was so exact in doing the right thing. And the men all, I don't know if the . . .

Graff: Where was he from?

Platt: He was from Salt Lake. And he was killed early during the war.

Graff: Yes.

Platt: He was shot down at sea. But he was a good man. But that lieutenant came back in there, and he was so embarrassed. He says, "I just daresn't [sic] go back in there." And I said, "Lieutenant, you've got to go back in there. You've got to go back in there. Just go back in there and sit down and eat your dinner like nothing had happened. Don't say a word. You apologize to Captain later because he's right. He's right. Just don't say anything. Apologize to him later." He finally did. He did, oh, boy.

Graff: Let me ask you this: did you, as cooks, did you tell—if I understand, there were people who went to Cedar City in their trucks to pick up food and stuff, and I understand you ordered some of it and it came down once a month from Salt Lake and all that, but were you able to order what you wanted to prepare, or did they send you, and then you had to do with what you had got?

Platt: We had to do with what we got. I don't know how much the mess sergeant had to with the ordering, but I'm sure the mess officer had quite a bit to do with it.

Graff: But you were cooks, you had this here . . .

Platt: Let me give you an example. One of the mess officers we had over at Bryce, he loved—he'd come from back east somewhere—and he loved blackberries. He just *loved* blackberries. And he never sent an order in that didn't have some blackberries on it. Well, our shelves were getting loaded with blackberries, and the boys wouldn't eat them. We tried to fix them in pies and puddings and cakes and everything else, and we just couldn't

use them up fast enough to keep that supply down. And when they were getting tired with them, we served them fresh and everything else. And they were tired of them. And so our shelves were getting filled with blackberries. Finally, the old man wanted to know why we were showing such a great inventory and didn't have any food. So we took him back and showed him, and he put a stop to that right now. [Laughs] I think the lieutenants who were in charge of the mess did have something to do about what was ordered.

Graff: Who prepared the daily menu? Was that the head cook or . . .

Platt: The mess sergeant. The mess sergeant did that. And a lot of times . . .

Graff: And then . . .

Platt: . . . a lot of times, we had to ad lib. He'd make out a menu maybe for the week, and sometimes we didn't have what we had on there, so we'd have to ad lib, make up our own menu when it come time to fix a meal. But that wasn't too serious. Usually we could follow the menu pretty good.

Graff: Pretty well fed—pretty good—most of the time that you were in the CCCs.

Platt: Oh, yes. I never remember going hungry. The only trouble we ever had with food in the CCCs was that time up in Mayfield.

Graff: Yeah.

Platt: And we were getting a lot of hominy and a lot of carrots and a lot of crap, you know. They were taking the better stuff.

Graff: Sure.

Platt: Well, you know, I had an experience in the army. Our mess sergeant used to bring some of his buddies in at night and eat up all the steaks.

Graff: Sure.

Platt: And he was a good mess sergeant for them, but we were serving stew after that. We didn't have enough steaks to go around, so we cut them up into stew. You got to do something with what you've got. And so we had to ad lib in the CCC a little bit. But most generally, we could follow the menus that were made for us. We didn't have problems like that, with somebody coming in and eating up all the good stuff.

Graff: Well, I think I've about got everything I need here. If there's something specific, something that you remember that you just want to make sure we get recorded . . .

Platt: Well, unless you want to hear that poem I've got . . .

Graff: Let's put it on there. Let go . . .

Platt: Would you like, would you like to hear that?

Graff: Sure.

Platt: Well Harrison R. Merrill wrote a poem. He called it “Let This Be Heaven.” And the only place I’ve seen it in print is on a post card that has the Great White Throne picture on it. And I still have that recording of it, but I have never seen it in print anywhere else. And recently I quoted this poem at Fish Lake, and so many people asked for copies of it that I asked them to see if they couldn’t find it printed in libraries in Salt Lake or somewhere. And a lady wrote me later, and she said, “I have looked through all the libraries in Salt Lake, and I cannot find that picture—or that poem—in print under that man’s name.” So I sat down and wrote her a copy of it. But I think it’s an immortal poem. It tells how I feel about this old world we’re living in, and I think it’s quite applicable to this land of Zion. “Let this be Heaven,” by Harris Norm Merrill:

Oh, God, let this be heaven.
 I do not ask for golden streets,
 nor long for jasper walls,
 nor do I sigh for pearly shores
 where twilight never falls.
 Just leave me here
 beside these peaks
 in this rough western land.
 I love this dear old world of thine.
 Dear God, you understand.

Oh, God, let this be heaven.
 I do not crave white stainless robes;
 I love these marked with toil.
 Instead of straight and narrow walks,
 I love trails soft with soil.
 I have not been healed by crystal streams,
 but these, from snow-crowned peaks,
 where dawn burns incense to the day
 and paints the sky in streaks.

Oh God, let this be heaven.
 I do not ask for angels’ wings.
 Just leave that old peak there,
 and let me climb till comes the night.
 I want no golden stair.
 And when I’ve said my last adieus,
 and all farewells are given,
 just leave my spirit here somewhere.
 Oh, God, let this be heaven.

Graff: Beautiful.

Platt: I've always loved that poem, and I've never been able to find it in print anywhere. Of course, I haven't hunted too much but these people did, apparently.

Graff: It's a good thing you've got it, then.

Platt: Well I still have the card. The card is torn, but I still have all the poem attached on it, and I treasure it.

Graff: It was actually printed . . .

Platt: Right over the face of the picture in the bright snow.

Graff: Well, that's tremendous.

Platt: We had another fellow here in camp that would come from Richfield. He died just recently, just this summer—Garth Lowe. He was living in Elsinore at the time, but he was a Richfield boy. But he was over at Mayfield with us, and then he came down to Bryce and then down here to Zion, and shortly after he came here, he went to Fort Douglas, I think, somewhere up there. He went to Fort Douglas. But he left this camp.

[End of interview]