

Royal Taylor
Zion National Park Oral History Project
CCC Reunion
September 28, 1998

Interviewed by: *Unknown*

Transcribed by: Anastacia Harlan

Date transcription began: March 10, 2011

Royal Taylor
Zion National Park Oral History Project
CCC Reunion
September 28, 1989

Interviewer: Okay, I am the interviewer in this interview. The interview is taking place at the Nature Center at Zion National Park, Utah. The date is September the 28th 1999. The interviewee is Royal Taylor. R-O-Y-A-L T-A-Y-L-O-R. Okay, Mr. Taylor, when did you come into the CCC's?

Royal Taylor: I came into the CC in July of 1934. We left Ogden, Utah, about one o'clock in the afternoon and we arrived in Zion National Park about 2:30 the following morning. They brought us down in a school bus that was owned by Rulon Peterson and some of the fellows came in a cattle truck that he also owned. They rode in the back end of the cattle truck. We were lucky that we got to ride in the bus. In fact, I drove the bus part way down because I knew Mr. Peterson and he let me act as his relief driver. We arrived about 2:30 in the morning. The following morning they had us out and gave us clothing and outfitted us out, stood us up in line. The captains of the camp, they introduced themselves and told us what they expected of us and told us what we could do and what we couldn't do. They gave us a series of tests and shots. The next day we were ready to go to work.

Interviewer: What were you doing before? Where were you living and what were you doing before you came into the CCC?

Royal Taylor: I lived on a farm in Plain City and I grew up on this farm. My mother passed away when I was six years old during the flu epidemic. My father remarried and with six brothers. At the time I came in to the CC camp, I'd left home because of problems with my stepmother. I'd been living with some other families that I knew. So it was probably a lifesaver to me to get into the CC camps.

Interviewer: How many brothers and sisters did you have?

Royal Taylor: I had six brothers and no sisters.

Interviewer: Six brothers.

Royal Taylor: I started out as a truck driver. After we'd been in camp for a while they took us all down to Bolder Dam to see the dam. I drove the kitchen truck down there.

Interviewer: So they just sort of took a temporary camp down there to feed you.

Taylor: We were down there for three days. We took our own grub and that with us. It was a three day trip. We left here about eight o'clock in the morning and arrived at Boulder

Dam about 2:30 or three o'clock in the afternoon. Or Las Vegas, we arrived in Las Vegas. They put us in a Ward [church] house down there and we took sleeping bags and slept on the floor. We had our own cooks. The next day we went out to the dam and got a chance to tour the dam. They were making the last pour of the last section of Boulder Dam when we arrived there. It was quite an experience to be able to go there and see it. Especially to see the big trucks that was hauling the gravel and material down to the dam. They had places cut out in the side of the mountain where they passed one another. And those trucks would go as fast going in reverse going up the hill as they would be coming down loaded. These guys would meet and they'd pass one another, never slow down. And if they didn't meet at these turn offs, then they was in trouble.

Interviewer: I bet they were.

Taylor: We got a change to go through the dam and they took us back into Vegas. Vegas comprised of about sixteen thousand people at that time. There was one street there called Sixteenth Street and that's where all the night action was. Of course, they kept us away from there.

Interviewer: They didn't let you go down there?

Taylor: No. But the next day coming back to the camp, the fellows had all got a hold of some wine, some of them had bought some whiskey that was all stored on the kitchen truck in garbage cans. I had four or five people riding on the truck in the back end. The man, I forget his name, he was over the truck drivers were riding in the cab with me and one of his helpers. They disconnected the governor on the truck and as we came back, why we took one wild ride.

Interviewer: I'll bet and you were driving?

Taylor: I was the driver and we came up through Zion on that gravel road forty and fifty miles an hour. How we got around some of the turns, I don't even remember. We came through the Park station there, never stopped. We had no sooner got down to the kitchen there and was unloading when one of the park rangers was over and wanting to know who the driver of that truck was. That ended my career as a truck driver in the CCC.

Interviewer: They took you off truck driving after that experience?

Taylor: They sure did.

Interviewer: What did you do after that?

Taylor: I was powder monkey. I worked in the quarry. It was me and Glen Taylor and we did dynamite work from then until I left the camp the following August. Some days we'd

shoot as high as two hundred shots. Maybe some shots would have a quarter of a stick of dynamite in a cap. Some might have a stick and a half. What we had to do was shoot those rocks so that two men could load them on the back end of one of those little dump trucks they had. They hauled them up the canyon and that's what they used for the cribbing in the river. I don't know thousands truckloads that we dynamited in that quarry. But it was months that it was seven trucks hauling. They'd leave camp at eight o'clock in the morning and we'd get back to camp at 4:30 at night. Each truck would make four or five trips and rock hauling up there for the cribbing in the river, along the river.

Interviewer: Where was the quarry located, do you remember?

Taylor: The quarry was above Springdale, outside of the park. We also did scaling work there. There were a lot of rocks up on the mountain. We'd go down over the face of the cliff in a chair. We had a little chair that we'd sit in and they'd let us up and down with a rope and a pulley. We'd load these rocks, mostly in crevices behind the rock, and shoot the rocks so they'd roll down into the quarry. And they'd drill them and we'd load them and shoot them. When we first started, they didn't have clippers, so we'd clip the cap with our teeth or a pair of pliers or whatever we'd get a hold of. Then when we'd shoot them, why we'd take couple of feet of the fuse and we'd cut a notch every inch, so that when we lit the notch, you'd bend that a little bit and the fire would spit out of that notch and that's the way we'd light the shots. We'd cut forty or fifty notches in that two or three feet of fuse, whatever they had ready to shoot. They'd move the people out of there and then back out of the quarry so far and we'd light and then they'd wait five minutes, and then bring the trucks in and start loading the rocks again. I remember one time we'd tried to count the shots and I'd had two shots and one rock that hadn't went off. So I waited five minutes and then I walked back over to the rock and I just touched the fuse that was coming up out of that rock. As I touched that fuse, a little puff of smoke came up out of the rock, and I did a back somersault about fifty yards down the trail before that smoke had cleared away. Evidently what happened, the fuse burned right down to the cap and then went out. The little bit of smoke that was in there at the time was probably trapped in there by some of the dirt.

Another scaling job we did was up there just below the tunnel, as you come out of the tunnel down around the curve. There was a big rock up there that they figured that was between seven hundred and eighty and a thousand tons of rock in that particular rock. They'd had another man by the name of Len Lyman and a couple of his men who had been miners. They had drilled the rock and wired it to shoot it. The park superintendent was going to do the shooting. Of course they'd brought some people down from Salt Lake to take pictures of it and some of the Park officials had come. They hauled in a number of loads of logs and put on the road down below so that when the shot went off the rocks wouldn't damage the road. They closed the park down for the afternoon and

didn't let traffic through. They got ready to shoot it and the Park superintendent pushed the plunger down and nothing happened. So it was a big disappointment to everybody there. The following day they had myself and Glen Taylor, they asked us to come up and help them find out what the problem was. We started checking it over and we found that some of the wires, instead of wiring them in a series, they'd crossed them and this had voided the contact. That was the reason it didn't go off. After checking with it, I decided that we needed twice as much dynamite in it as they had loaded to do the job the way I thought it ought to be done. So they gave me the assignment, me and Glen Taylor, the assignment of re-drilling and reloading it. We worked a week on it. We drilled holes, some of them as much as twelve feet deep into that rock and we loaded four or five sticks of dynamite in the hole. They had two sticks, I think, the most they had in any of the holes. We went through and reloaded a lot of them and doubled the size of the loads in them. Of course, then we had to rewire the thing. They hauled their logs back in and loaded them on the road. The Park superintendent went up and they made the shot early in the morning. They said that there wasn't one rock that came down that two men couldn't pick up and throw on the dump truck. So we really pulverized that.

Interviewer: Well, you had plenty of practice of getting those down to the right size.

Taylor: After I left the CC camp I had a farmer that I knew. He wanted some locust trees put in a fence. But he didn't know how to get them split. So I told if he could get me some dynamite why I'd help him split them. Of course he thought I was crazy. But I drilled those logs for him, those locust logs, and shot them the same way we did shots up there. I split these several trees for him so he could put them in. What he used them for was around gates and they had a high gate that went up twelve, fourteen feet up in the air. Then he had wires or pulls across. Some of them had the name of his ranch hung on them, others he had wires to carry the heavy gates that they had coming across. So when I left the camp, I left with the idea that I was going to get a job on the Pine View Dam that was just starting to be built in Ogden Canyon. When I got up there, there was no chance to go to work up there. So I got a job on the railroad.

Interviewer: What railroad did you work for?

Taylor: I worked for Southern Pacific Railroad out on the B and B gang. We worked out there that summer. Then I got married in November of 1935. I left the camp in April, around the first of April, in 1935. I met my wife and was married in November of that year. I worked ten days in beet fields topping beets from daylight 'til dark and got a twenty dollar bill and that's what we got married on. We went to Salt Lake and spent three days in Temple Square Hotel. I think when we went home I had a dollar left. That's what we started our married life on. On the second of January, the railroad called me back as a carpenter's helper. I went into the carpentry trade. That's what I spent my life doing,

carpentry work. I spent 22 years with the Granite School District as a building inspector. I inspected about forty or fifty buildings of those buildings that were built during that period of time. Skyline High School was one of them, which won an international award as one of the best high schools in the world as far as designing it was concerned due to the architect's experience. We had trouble with the roof, but I refused to accept the roof because of the trouble they had when they put in on. They used a fiberglass roof and it was put on during the winter time. My contention was that they were wrecking the roof as they were working over the top of the fiberglass. Everyone else, the superintendent and all the people in the district accepted the roof, but I had it on record that I wouldn't accept the roof. When the lawsuit came up, they decided that I had ample reason to reject it. Because I did an experiment that I felt was conducive to what was happening when the building was built. You take a puddle and when it freezes over, if you take your foot and tap on it lightly why there is little cracks that develop all over the ice due to some air trapped in there, above the water. This is what was happening to the fiberglass as they wheeled the wheelbarrows over. The fiberglass was cracking and in the winter time when the ice started to freeze and thaw, why the water got into those cracks and the thawing of the ice and the freezing of it expanded the cracks and the water went right on through and into the building. Ice has a potential of 5,000 pounds psi or 30,000 pound. If we get 5,000 pound concrete in the building, we figure we got good concrete. When you figure 30,000 pound of pressure on ice, there's got a lot of trouble.

Interviewer: Okay. Tell me a little bit more about Zion camp. Now when you first came in, you came right here to Zion Park, to the camp?

Taylor: Yes. We came right to the camp. The camp had a group of New York people in here before we came in. We were the first group from Utah, I think, to come into it in 1944. 250 came in, 200 of us from Ogden and Salt Lake area, and the other 50 were from the central part of the state.

Interviewer: Now '34, right? You came in '34?

Taylor: Yes. But the number of the camp was 1944.

Interviewer: Okay. I got you.

Taylor: We came in '34. Course we had a great camp. Kennedy was our captain. We had a Lieutenant Vorpaul, who was the lieutenant. Some of the foremen over the different jobs was Bill Miller from Washington. Hy Jessup who was a full blooded Indian was from Springdale here, he was one of our foremen; a man by the name of Wetherill; and Johnny Excell who lived here in the Springdale area for a number of years was another foremen. I don't remember some of the other foremen. We spent nearly all of our time during the working day in the quarry above Springdale. There was a road that went through private

property there to get up into the camp. I think there's an amphitheater up there now that was put in by O. C. Tanner, who I later worked for and remodeled his home for him. I've known O. C. Tanner ever since I moved to Salt Lake in 1946. We'd go up there in the morning. In the wintertime, there was a lot of time where we'd have snow down here. One morning I was up there, and I'd been out loading some shots and it was cold and snow on the ground. Mr. Wetherill said, "Royal, how can we get these men off to work? I can't get them to move. They won't get away from the fire." I said, "Well, I'll see what I can do." So I walked over to where I'd been working and crimping shots and getting them ready to load, and picked up a couple of sticks of dynamite and walked over and threw it in the fire. He had them all out working within in a matter of minutes. But I think that he was one of the first ones that was half a block away from the fire. He told me later, "Don't ever do that again, unless you give me a little notice." He says, "I thought I was going to kill myself." We had a lot of fun and we had a lot of good experiences. We had one fellow up there that had a small caterpillar that used to push some of the rocks down the hill so we could bore them, get them down next to the road. We made our own roads up there so we could get in to load the trucks and that. He was up there cutting some capers one day on a rock that was up quite a ways on one of the knolls there. He got too close to the edge of that rock and the Cat tipped over, but luckily he jumped off as the cat went over, so we didn't have to bury him.

Interviewer: What was it like in the camp here in Zion?

Taylor: Oh, we had a great time in the camp. I had a pet lizard that I kept by my bed for a while. Some of the guys had different kinds of pets. Of course when the captain came through, he made us get rid of them. We laid out all the camp ground here. We put the sprinkling systems in and put some of the water works in. We designed the roads through here and graded them out. Then they built this building here. About that time or shortly after that, the Union Pacific built it.

Interviewer: This building right here, the Nature Center?

Taylor: That was built by Union Pacific. We also did the dynamite work for a lot of the rock that went into the warehouse up here. The rock that went up for the cribbing, they'd pick special rock out and haul it up here and it was put into the warehouse at that time.

Interviewer: Did you know a fellow named Strickum?

Taylor: I don't remember that name.

Interviewer: Oh, Stockham Frank Stockham.

Taylor: I don't remember the name. Was he with the Park service?

Interviewer: He was CCC. Now he came in '33. He did some of the chiseling, some of the stonework.

Taylor: Then he was in before I came in the C's. Maybe was in the camp that was across the river from us.

Interviewer: Now, he was in the Watchmen Camp. The first one of them built.

Taylor: Now, that was the camp across the river from us. Whitney was their captain. I think those people built the warehouse, or started it. They used a lot of the rock that we dynamited in that camp. They had a little place up there where they stored the dynamite and caps. They told us not to haul the dynamite and caps on the same truck, so we'd put the dynamite in back of the truck and put the caps in the cab with us. We figured if the dynamite blew up we'd be safe.

Interviewer: You were in the camp on this side of the river?

Taylor: I was in camp 1944. Captain Kennedy was the captain of that camp.

Interviewer: What did you all do for entertainment?

Taylor: Well, we made a lot of our own entertainment. At that time, I had an accordion. I was going to learn how to play the accordion, so I'd used to cord on that until the guys would tell me to shut up and threatened to kick me out of camp. One time we carried the piano down out of the mess hall down almost to the Park line in a kind of a meadow that was down there. We were down there having a big dance and raising Cain, drinking beer and having fun. Then the captain, and sergeant, and the lieutenant came down there and told us to get back to camp. It was after bedtime. So we all went back to camp and they spent the rest of the night hauling the piano back up to the mess hall. Course the next morning they lined us all up outside the camp and gave us a lecture on conduct and what we should do and what we shouldn't be doing.

Interviewer: Now, is this after your trip to Las Vegas? This is after you were the truck driver that didn't stop at the gate?

Taylor: This was after the trip to Vegas. This was in the spring of '35.

Interviewer: Sounds like you kept them hopping around here a little bit.

Taylor: We did. When we came in here and they had their dances, the people down in Springdale they had some trouble with people from New York, so they didn't know if they wanted us guys to coming down to their dances or not. And they'd charge us 50 cents a ticket to get into the dance and it was two bits a ticket for everybody else. So a group of us decided that we were going to boycott the dance, so we all stayed home from the dance.

Four of the fellows slipped out of camp here and went down to the dance and had just a great time. One of the guys that happened to be downtown he came and told us about it. So we decided that we'd go down and get them. We went down and the sheriff at that time, or the man at the gate, told us we couldn't go in unless we bought a ticket. Two or three of the men grabbed him and held him while the others went in and got the four guys that was in there dancing with the girls. They took them out there on the steps and stripped them all down but their shorts. They had probably forty guys in the group that went down there. They all had a green willows and they run them down through this road between the groups on each side and every one of them took a whack at them. Then they got in the car and headed them for camp. They rode on the fenders on the car and they'd switch them if they didn't keep running. They run those guys barefooted all the way back from Springdale. The next day, the captain had us all out in line and told us that we shouldn't do things like that. But he said that bishop of the Ward down there had decided to let the camp men come down and they'd let them in for 25 cents a head.

Interviewer: That's still pretty steep price considering how much money you all were making.

Taylor: But we were glad to get in for that. The camp would let us take trucks and we went to Tropic, to Hurricane, and LaVerkin, different places like that. They'd load the girls up in the back of these stake body trucks. They'd have benches in there for them to sit on. They'd bring them up here to Springdale the Ward house there. After the dance the men was supposed to come back to camp and the ones that was driving the trucks back to take the girls back, they'd leave after they'd got the girls loaded up and drive three or four miles an hour down the road. The guys would be down the side of the road, waiting to load onto the truck. They'd ride home with the girls. They'd get home the next morning about four in the morning. The captain and them, whether they knew what was going on, they didn't ever stop them from doing it. That's the entertainment we had.

Interviewer: Sounds like it was pretty lively to me.

Taylor: We had some good times. The people down here were great. Some of the loads that we loaded up there, just to let people know that we were still around, we'd tie four or five sticks of dynamite in a bunch and set it on top of the rock. When the rock blew up, the dynamite on top would go off too, and it'd rattle their windows. This one big shot we did down there in the quarry. I used three and half boxes of dynamite in it, and then I took what was left out of the fourth box and set it right on top of the rock. When it went off, it cracked the windows in some of the houses down here. I think I'm the only one who knew that there that was half a box of dynamite sitting on top of that rock when it blew up.

End of interview.