TETON ORAL HISTORY PROGRAM

Ricks College
Idaho State Historical Society
History Department, Utah State University

# TETON DAM DISASTER

J. Kent Marlor

Interviewed by

David L. Crowder

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UTAH STATE UNIVERSITY & RICKS COLLEGE

HISTORY DEPARTMENTS

COMMUNITY IMPROVEMENT THROUGH LOCAL HISTORY

ORAL HISTORY PROGRAM

INTERVIEWER AGREEMENT

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7/7/77
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INTERVIEWEE AGREEMENT

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A tape recording of your interview has been made by the interviewer. A verbatim typescript of the tape will be made and a final typed and edited transcripts, together with the tape will be made and a final will then be filed in the Milton R. Merrill Library Special Collections, David O. McKay Library at Ricks College, and the Idaho State Historical Society in Boise. This material will be made available according to each of the depositories' policies for research be scholars and by others for scholarly purposes. When the final transcript is completed, a personal copy will be sent to you.

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In view of the historical and scholarly value of this information, I, J. Kent Maylor (please print full name), do hereby assign full and all rights of this material to the Merrill Library at Utah State University, to the Library at Ricks College, and to the Idaho State Historical Society at Boise, Idaho, for scholarly purposes according to each of the institutions governing policies.

J. Kent Maylor
Interviewee's Signature

7/7/77
Date

ORAL HISTORY

INTERVIEWEE: J. Kent Marlor

INTERVIEWER: David L. Crowder

DATE: July 7, 1977

TETON DAM DISASTER

C: Kent, would you please spell your name?

M: J. Kent Marlor

C: How long have you lived in Rexburg?

M: Fourteen years now.

C: Where were you living at the time of the flood?

M: We live on Highway 88, two and a half miles west of Rexburg.

C: Were members of your family at home on the day of the flood?

M: Some of us were and some weren't. My children and I were home and I was doing some yard work. My wife happened to be right on the banks of the Snake River at Beaver Dick Park with a scout group when the dam collapsed.

C: What kind of a day was June 5, 1976?

M: I recall that I had gone fishing with the civil defense director the day before, or probably there was a good chance that we might have been out fishing that day. Really, as operations director for county civil defense, I hadn't had any recent meetings, or we didn't really get very much advance notice of the dam collapse, so I was home with my children doing some yard work at the time that I heard of the dam's impending collapse.

C: How did you hear of that?

M: Our next door neighbor rushed over and told me. She said, "The dam on the Teton River has collapsed. I just heard it on the radio." I proceeded then to turn on the truck radio, I was next to my truck, and I didn't hear anything but music

for a few minutes, and then finally an announcement on KRXK that people along the river ought to move to high ground because there was an extenseive amount of water pouring out of the dam and there was danger to them.

C; What was your reaction when you heard that?

M: Well, I heard the announcement, I shouted for the kids to jump in the back of the truck and the first thing that I did was to head to Beaver Dick Park and tell my wife to get the scouts and the scout leaders out of there and then I took her right with me. We didn't change clothes or anything. I headed for the courthouse because my responsibility was to evacuate the county. As I arrived at the courthouse, I met the civil defense director who had pulled in at the same time.

C: You never had a moment's doubt that it actually was occurring?

M: No. I didn't at all with that report on the radio. The only thing that I could think of was that I had a responsibility and we didn't, of course, have any idea how long it would be until the entire dam would collapse. I was concerned primarily about life, other people's lives being lost because of what seemed to be impending at the time.

C: What was your official position?

M: The Operations Director for Madison County Civil Defense.

C: How did you obtain that position?

M: I was drafted, I think. The civil defense director, about five or six years ago asked me if I would be operations director and I accepted. It was a non-paying position, a volunteer civic kind of thing that you do. You receive an amount of training through potential disaster situations where you learn your role in a disaster and how to react. We had had about three of these over the past five years. At least that is all that I can recall at this time.

C: Who was the civil defense director?

M: Ronnie E. Moss.

C: Did you anticipate just staying in the courthouse?

M: We really didn't know, of course. The extent of the total water coming out of the dam was unknown. I had tried to get him on the phone and the phone lines were out to Archer before the dam ever broke. I couldn't get him even before I left to get my wife. As I got to the courthouse, he had used the ham radio and had a plane on the way from Idaho Falls to pick him up and the Madison County Commissioner. Then they were to fly over the dam to critically evaluate the situation. I set up a communications operation in the courthouse via ham radio. We had a communications officer right there at the time. This occurred within five minutes. Moss and Commissioner Walker headed for the airport in a police car and I had a radio message back within fifteen minutes while they were approaching the dam from the air.

C: What did you do with your family?

M: I told my wife to take them to my office on the campus and wait there.

C: Did you have any concern at all for your personal belongings at your home?

M: There wasn't any time for that. I couldn't be concerned. In fact, after the dam broke, I never got a chance to get to my house for nearly three weeks.

C: Did you think that the water would actually get high enough to reach your house?

M: Yes. If the whole dam collapsed, I fully expected we would be flooded because we live only about one hundred and fifty yeards from the river.

C: When did it become apparent that you were not going to be able to stay in the courthouse?

M: The first radio message I got back from Ron Moss. I received it about the time that the first big wall of water came out of the dam and proceeded down the canyon. It was just to the point where it was hitting the Wilford Church.

At that point, he said, "You had better start to evacuate the county." I said, "Well, if we have that much water, it appears to me that we had better get ready to move from the courthouse."

We then implemented a three stage evacuation in Rexburg. That three stage evacuation, the first, involved moving right out of the courthouse. The civil defense offices in the courthouse were in the basement so we had really no choice but to get out of there and get out of there fast to high ground or we wouldn't have had a working communications system.

I can recall that one of the interesting things as we evacuated the offices and left the courthouse, we got out of there and then one of the sheriff's people said, "Gee whiz, we forgot to pull the prisoners out of there." So they had to go back down to the courthouse to the jail and get the prisoners. Without this action, they would have had a bit of a problem because of the water across the courthouse lawns.

C: Would you explain further this three point evacuation plan?

M: We still didn't know exactly how far that water was going to come into Rexburg, so we looked at a three stage evacuation. First, from the south fork of the Teton River to First North in Rexburg. Then from First North, south in two stages. Actually, we evacuated to what is really the foot of the campus on an east-west basis.

We received water in some areas within a half a block and in other areas right up to that particular point. That is as far south as we attempted the evacuation within Rexburg itself.

C: How did you implement that evacuation?

M: The first thought that occurred to me as I got into the courthosue, before really we had the other two county commissioners, was that we have got to alert the people and we, at that time, asked the sheriff's office to sound the civil

defense sirens in both Sugar City and Rexburg. The sirens sounded and I walked out the door to grab our communications man and they shut off the sirens after about a minute. It really bothered me because at that point I thought if I can't depend on them to leave those sirens on, I can't depend on them for anything. I physically had to grab the one deputy and told him to leave those sirens on until I ordered him to turn them off. You can imagine at that point that they were flustered.

We gave them orders to notify everyone on a house by house, street by street bases. Wtih the sirens going, they began carrying our nofitications. The state police were already involved at that time and did a Herculean job for their numbers throughout the county. The radio station was still, believe it or not, interrupting their announcement of the dam collapse with music every so often. At that point, Commissioner Klingler came in and I told him that we just needed to have that announcement on the air constantly on every radio station in the area and especially on the two Rexburg stations.

We left the courthouse to take over broadcasting, if necessary, from KRXK. It wasn't long after that that KRXK, as I understand it, in an attempt to keep on the air, plowed a trench around their transmitter and cut the electrical connection in the process. They went off the air before the flood ever hit.

C: Was there some legal authority for the commissioner to take over radio stations?

M: Yes. We had legal precendent for this in so far as emergency situations in the past and the governor eventually declared it a state of emergency. In fact, this situation would border even if necessary on marital law. But then of course that didn't occur and as a matter of fact, the county became the principle agent of government for the people throughout the entire disaster

period. We felt all the way through that this was the best because the county unit was the closest to the people.

C: Did you get into a position where you could see the flood waters coming across the valley?

M: Yes. The minute that I determined we had to evacuate the courthouse, I checked with the civil defense director on the radio and he told me to go ahead. That was the correct procedure. We moved the civil defense headquarters to the reserve center, Mysaki Hall on the hill, Rexburg hill. At that point, I was up on the roof. We had several sets of binoculars, the commissioners and I. Director Moss came back then and we viewed the water as it approached Rexburg from the northeast. It was a very different kind of sight to see as you looked out there. You could see ahead of this water a cloud of dust, just like you would see if you were irrigating a field. When you irrigate a field, as the water travels down a furrow, for example, a little bit of dust puffs up in front of the total wall of water as it moves. You could actually see this across in front of the total wall of water as it approached Rexburg. Then all you could see was the dark color of the water as it engulfed everything. The minute that it moved to the east of Rexburg we could see houses floating everywhere. These houses moved and smashed. You could see them going across Smith Park. One could also see, with the binoculars, as the flood waters crossed the Rexburg timber yard over there, just fantastic numbers of logs moving to the west and to the southwest after the water crossed that area.

C: Did you ever have the feeling that this was a divine retribution for unrighteousness?

M: I have been told this, but in analysis, I don't know that. I guess I have looked at it from the governmental perspective that I see it to the greatest extent involving errors in dam construction and design.

C: After the flood waters got to Rexburg, what did you do then as far as your official capacity was concerned?

M: One of the principle responsibilities that I had involved organizing all of the operations in civil defense to try and first determine loss of life and look at the maintainance of life. It was difficult that first twenty-four hours to determine loss of life. There was no way during those first hours to get into the areas that were flooded. The only thing that we could do was use the Bonneville County Jeep Patrol and the sheriff's office and state highway patrol, in attempting to get to the perifery of the flood area. They checked out the perifery area; abandoned automobiles, residences, etc., to determine if lives had been lost.

We attempted to get helicopters from the air guard over here, just as rapidly as possible. But they did not materialize until the next morning. We had the general's helicopter here about sundown Saturday night, but there really was no reconnaissance work or search and rescue work accomplished until that next day. The other thing that we were concerned about was property loss and fires. We had a number of gasoline storage tanks in Rexburg that were in flames, two different tanks, we had lost two buildings, small buildings, that Saturday night. It was difficult to get these fires out. We, in the end, drained numbers of tanks to decrease the fire hazard. We did have more fires develop.

But that Saturday evening we made preparations for what to do come Sunday and again searched the periferal areas and blocked traffic, both to the south and north of Rexburg. That took us until about two o'clock a.m. Sunday. I think that that night the commissioners and civil defense director and I got about three and a half hours sleep and we were back at five thirty in the morning, ready to start. The helicopters finally arrived Sunday ready to move out and work by about eight a.m.

C: Did the county commission have jurisdiction over all the agencies in the area?

M: This was the plan. I recall that former Governor Andrus came to us and we were able to get to Sugar City. The chairman of the commission and I had a discussion with him as to what powers existed and what was the county's authority. Andrus told the commissioner and I that there were five different things that the state would attmept to do immediately, to assist us. Keith Walker told him that those five things had already been done by the county. There were numbers of other things that we wanted accomplished but the governor felt that the county should retain all jurisdiction, since the dam collapse was a problem that involved people within the county and the county unit was closest to the people. This was the situation throughout the entire disaster area.

We had meetings every morning for the first seven or eight months at 7:00 a.m. These meetings, the staff meetings, were also attended by federal people. We had correlation meetings with the federal agencies as well, three times a week for about the first four months. But the county, in each situation, was the level of government, the unit of government that retained jurisdiction. All of the others were considered by the governor and the federal people as well, here to assist county government in meeting the needs of the people. In short, they were advisory.

C; How about the religious jurisdiction?

M: This is very, very critical. We had organization charts made up, from an operations perspective, looking at how to develop a chain of command if a disaster occurred. We really scrapped the one we had to a great extend and developed direct doordination with the religious leaders to the county government.

I can't say enough about how effectively this really worked. It was a hundred per cent. We had all of the different religions involved in this. With the L.D.S. religion, we had the stake presidents involved and under them, of course, the bishops to their particular flocks. We had the Community Church involved critically. As a matter of fact, when the church, the L.D.S. Church, provided assistance through its welfare program, bishop's storehouse order blanks were given to the Community Church leader and he felt good about this. He told me that he thought since he had really jurisdiction equivalent to a stake president, he would kind of be promoted. But the effort worked effectively with the people. The religious leaders coordinated this and the value system of the people and their closeness with their leaders, trusting them, the county leaders, the religious leaders as well, made it very effective all the way through.

Our evacuation, with neighbors telling neighbors, etc., was so effective that by the way, we did not have one person drown in Madison County as a result of that flood. Not one person from this county.

C: Did you get up in a helicopter to survey the situation?

M: I was up in a helicopter,the first helicopter that lifted off Sunday morning, to survey the situation.

C: What was your reaction, looking at it from the air?

M: One of the first things that I was concerned with and we had the state highway representative, Tom Baker as one of the passengers, the chopper, and chairman of the county commission was with us, was the transportation system. We had no way to get people in and out of the county, to get goods and services from the north to the south end of the county. I can recall my first reaction was, "Good hell, we have no roads in the county." It was totally unbelievable. We had but only one bridge across the Teton River that was still in existence.

It was really interesting that the approaches to the bridge were about fifteen feet deep washed out on either side. The road to this bridge ultimately became our first alternate U.S. 191 route to the north. But even the roadways themselves, the roadbeds were completely gone, especially those that ran north-south, because of course this was cross direction from the water flow. The county was roadless in the eight mile wide flood area.

I can recall looking at all these things and thinking, "How are we going to piece this thing back together when we can't even get back and forth within the flood area itself?" The second thing that hit me was the extent of damage to property and businesses and homes. I remember one of the first areas that we flew across was the western section of Rexburg, including the airport. There were airplanes strewn in every direction. Some of them as far as two miles west of the airport in sloughs and water. There was a big mobile home court which was just west of the airport. I don't recall exactly how many mobile homes were in the court, but there wasn't one standing. All I could see were cement pads and the area completely devoid of any structures. Highway 88 west (now highway 33) was completely blocked with Boise Cascade type homes. The logs from the sawmill were everywhere, battered through houses, across roads From the chopper, I could see barbed wire fenses wrapped around every kind of debris. The debris was stacked as deep as twenty, thirty, or forty feet in some areas.

We proceeded through Sugar City and it was completely destroyed. There wasn't really anything left of Sugar City. The railroad tracks were twisted like pretzels and moved hundreds of yards. We could see D 9 caterpillars that had been moved a half to a mile to a mile and a half in the flood. The destruction was like a fan, really, the way this thing hit and you could see that from the air. I was impressed with that that first morning, because of course, where the flood waters came from the canyon, the path of destruction was fairly

narrow and as the waters then moved laterally, the width of the area increased to about eight miles in the western areas of Madison County.

C; Were there areas where the water had not hit for some unexplainable reason?

M: This is really amazing and it was that morning. We pointed this out to each other in that chopper. We recently had a hundred year flood plain study given to us by the corps of engineers. This was, I think, in September. But there were places that water completely ripped through and demolished structures above the hundred year flood plain. There were other structures below the hundred year flood plain that didn't get touched. There ought to be a scientific basis for the way that water moved, but the way the water moved and what it did just defies nearly reality as we know it. There seemed to be no rhyme or reason to the way that it traveled.

Here is just one example. We thought that all of the water, when it hit Beaver Dick Park and went west to the butte, would travel along the east end of the butte to the river, and yet when the water hit that butte, it split with half of it going to the east, half of it going to the west of the butte. There is a low lying area of farm ground on the north end of the butte. Great quantities of water just stopped there. The farmer who was farming that particular area had all of his sprinkling system layed out and the water moved over the top of it and completely enclosed it. We had thousands of gallons in what we then called Manan Lake. We were later forced to get the corps of eningeers to provide contracts to pump the entire lake dry as the water could not settle into the ground because of the sediment under it. When the water was pumped out and as the ground dried up, it fractured and then popped in the air, just like popcorn. Underneath this sediment as they pushed it away, we found the irrigation sprinkling system completely repairable.

The force of the water at the butte wasn't nearly what it was, of course, in the upper area of the county. When the water split, it lost much of its punch. There was a situation where we saw in one home that a wedding cake was on the table. The whole house was washed away and the cake was still there intact, never having been moved from the table. At my own home, we never had one serious problem with the foundation. It is only 150 yeards from the river. Yet the home that is twenty yards from mine lost two walls. All of the other homes just across Highway 88 were completely gutted to the point where some of them didn't even have a brick left. The damage to my home was still serious because of the flood water, but the cement foundation structure wasn't really damaged severely.

C: Did you fly over your home that morning?

M: Yes. We flew west on 88 past my home and I can recall looking down there and I thought, "Well gee, the house is still there." The garage door was open and there were about eighteen head of cattle in the garage and on the cement right outside of the garage door. That was apparently the highest land point around that given area. I thought, "Gee, what a joke. I have got a whole herd of cattle on the place." That was at that point where we began to go across the south fork of the Teton.

We flew north along the river and that is when the reality really hit me that we had no roads. You couldn't hardly see where the roads had been in some situations.

C: Did you have the feeling that it was a completely hopless situation?

M: As highway engineer, Tom Baker, and I talked, he said, "It is going to be years before we get this in." And I said, "Oh, it can't be." He said, "You look, you can tell how deep the approaches are cut to those bridges, and we have no bridges. Do you realize how long that is going to take?"

Then we turned the chopper and flew west to Beaver Dick Park and believe it or not, the Beaver Dick Park Bridge across the Snake River was still intact. We were a little premature then, because we thought the approaches weren't too bad. We thought that we could go with it and after about two weeks of using the bridge, with heavy loads over it, we lost the Beaver Dick Bridge. It slowly sunk into the water and we didn't get a new bridge until the spring of '77.

I don't think that we thought the whole thing was hopeless, but we really knew our work was cut out for us. The thing we worried about most the minute we saw the level of destruction was how we were going to keep the people from really falling into a situation where they are despondent and where they want to give up and forget the whole thing and leave the county. On that flight, I remember the commissioner first mentioning we had to be careful or we were going to have suicides if we didn't watch it closely. We were commenting the best thing that we could do with the people was to get them to work on their places and the busier we could keep them, the better off they would be. Even if they couldn't repair the homes, they could still just go out and work to keep busy until we could get on top of the thing, we would be ahead.

C: Your immediate responsibility then was to get the people back and to their homes?

M: Right. To get them out of there and find out what was left. Now I mentioned that we were concerned with preserving life and the thing that really hit us hard that Sunday morning when we got back from the chopper, was concern over the water system.

One of the things that I had done Saturday was to make sure that we had our ambulance people and EMT's up at the hospital. We thought that there might be a possibility that we might have to evacuate the hospital. We met with our

EMT's and our helath advisors and we were advised by them that we had to consider the total Rexburg water system contaminated. I really wondered at that because it was a pressurized system. It maintained its pressure and I didn't know how we would get contamination in it if it remained pressurized. But we couldn't afford to take a chance. So at that point we disinfected the water at the command post at the reserve center as well as Ricks College. Then we tested water on a stage by stage basis throughout Rexburg before we allowed people to begin to use it again.

C: Kent, how did you go about accounting for all of the people in the flood plain?

M: This was really a difficult problem and it was because many people who lived just to the south of the north fork of the Teton had really gone north when the flood waters engulfed the county. At the same time some people who had lived to the north of the river, they had come south and so we had families split, some of them in St. Anthony and others of them in Rexburg. We had lists of hundreds of people who were not accounted for. We really didn't feel that the loss of life was going to be so extensive but I remember in the press interviews, the press kept coming after me saying, "Well look, how many deaths? Give us an estimate." In fact, the first thing that just drove us crazy on Saturday afternoon, after the water hit, was state civil defense kept calling on the radio saying, "We want a report of how many bodies, how many people are dead." We finally shut the radio off. We could not determine loss of life at that point.

We finally moved to a situation where we had a contact station set up in the Manwaring Center on the Ricks College campus and the college people graciously along with other volunteers in the county, developed lists of people who were reported missing by their own families and friends. We had radio communication set up, a short wave radio set, with St. Anthony. All our power lines were down across the flood area. The two Rexburg radio stations were

gone. We took over the radio station KIGO. We sent over our own radio operators licensed FCC people. We really ran that station as I recall for about three days. We also attempted to use short wave communications to try to reduce these lists to the point where we could tell actually who was missing. It was a difficult thing. It took us days to do it. But it was the only effective means we had to trying to account for people.

When we had somebody reported missing, we sent someone to their homes to see if the people were there. Another thing that bothered us on search and rescue was the question of how many tourists may have been caught in the middle of this thing. June 5th was right at the peak of the tourist season and the state police along with the national guard people flew over every automobile that was caught in the flood waters. There were hundreds and hundreds of them all over the county that had floated away. Large stickers that were afixed on top of the cars because they were, as a rule showing, indicating that they had already been searched. Even houses were marked where we thought there might be people lost. We did have some people whom we rescued by helicopter through that second day because of the lists. Also in part because of a sector by sector search we accomplished a search and rescue program, using state police, Bonneville County people, our sheriff's department and even city police, in some cases.

C: There were other people that you found then?

M: We found one gentleman that had gone out to feed his cattle or move his cattle on that Saturday afternoon and the flood waters had moved all the way around him and he was hung up and couldn't get out of the area. Some people knew that he was there but they were across and west of the river. This was to the south of Beaver Dick Park. The farmer was sopping wet. We had already had the search and rescue choppers go through there once and they hadn't spotted him.

But the second time around, he was spotted by DeVon Beattie and they dropped down and picked him up and then moved him. We had some other problems that were really quite unique.

One fellow in the Salem area had to milk his cows and so he figured out a way to get through the areas out there partially by vehicle and then he walked with his whole family to milk the cows. He had a nine-month pregnant daughter-in-law who was in the group and when the chopper went over they thought she might be close to delivery. They waved to the chopper and the chopper was full of people and they didn't have any room to take them and so they came back over and grabbed me and went out and ferried all these people back in. One of the problems that hit them too, was the fact that the canals were flooded in every direction and after the flood waters receeded we had no canal banks. The water was still getting into the canal system and where there was dry ground one minute, an hour later there could be two feet of water. These poeple couldn't get back out because of that. The only road we had open that first week was the road to Sugar city and I can recall being awakened about two thirty in the morning on Wednesday by the state police. They said, "You have lost your only road again. How do you feel?" I got up and said, "Well, if we have lost it, we've lost it. I thought that was the only road we had that was open." It made people feel more miserable when they couldn't get from Rexburg to Sugar City. So I remember rolling out and calling DeVon Beattie who was in charge of our heavy equipment and I think I had had about two hours sleep that night and he had had about the same. The state police called him and asked him to come up. They went down and knocked on his door and told him to come up and he said that he would be right up. Then he didn't come. I got the state police to go back down as I was trying to round up some equipment to move out there. He had fallen asleep trying to get out the door and they found him leaning

against the inside of the front door. He did make it down by about four o'clock and then we went after the water against that road.

It was again this canal problem that we had. We finally had to go up and close the canal gates down. In fact, we developed an entire drainage ditch from Sugar City south. Now this was the east part of Sugar City south, in order to catch those waters that were coming out of broken canals and try to keep 191 open at least to Sugar City.

C: Were there any other what you would consider unique problems that developed?

M: I think that some of the problems that developed, weren't the problems that the federal people anticipated. In our meetings they kept saying that we had to get counsellors in here to help the people. They just needed them. And they felt there were going to need them more, there is always great despondency that occurs. This may occur from three weeks to even two months afterwards. I can recall the commissioners, two of them had been counsellors in L.D.S. stake presidencies, one a bishop for twelve years at the time and in discussing the matter with them, they said we think our religious leaders are going to take care of that. These people aren't in that kind of a situation. They consulted the minister of the Community Church and he felt the same way. I told the federal people time and time again, "Forget it. We don't need counsellors." They said, "Well, you need them. You just have to have them. You need them." As a matter of a fact, we didn't. They could not understand and this was unique, they couldn't understand our organizational structure working through the Church. They said that it can't be, it wouldn't work and we couldn't do it that way. We kept trying to tell them to let us worry about it. It was during the first month they finally began to complain because they always said that we were two weeks ahead of them. They had never been in a disaster area where they had to gear up so rapidly.

On the volunteer work in Rexburg, by the time that the corps of engineers really began to clean up, we estimated that fifty to sixty percent of the total original debris cleanup was already accomplished by volunteer efforts. Another unique thing was when we began to submit damage survey reports from the county to the federal disaster assistance administration, they couldn't understand whey we dared submit bills for volunteer tire repair. We had a fifty-three thousand dollar tire repair bill during the first two weeks. You can imagine with as many as ten thousand volunteers in here tyring to help us, there were flat tires everywhere on everything. The federal disaster people said, "Well, we can't pay that bill. You never had any contract with the volunteers. They weren't charging you for the services. If you repaired their tires, you did it of your own volition. So don't expect payment." We said, "Well, if you really wanted a bill you could get one and it would cost you a lot more than the fifty-three thousand dollar tire repair bill." In the end, they paid it. It was about the same thing on the soda pop. I mentioned the fact that we didn't have purified water in Rexburg, all that we needed, although Fish and Game and others came in to give us water when people began to clean up houses. They didn't have containers to take water out to their homes so they could drink it so we ordered soda pop. We had about an eight thousand dollar soda pop bill. The federal people said that they couldn't pay the bill because pop was used for pleasure, it wasn't a necessity. In the end they paid that one, too.

Their approach to this, I think, was rather unique, too, because the situation was unique. They told us, Hugh Fowler, the deputy director of DFAA, has said that he has never seen any disaster like this in thirty years of working with disasters. He has never seen any rebuilding that compared at all with what had happened here in a little over a year now.

C: Was there any time when there was real overt conflict between the local government and other government officials.

M: We had some periods that were really tough. Most of the people I don't think realize this. Other than the conflicts we had with HUD, especially on mobile homes as they came in. We had some rough times with them at first, because we knew with winter, people didn't have decent mobile home housing that we would have trouble. They guaranteed us that all the mobile homes were winterized. Yet, I remember one situation going with the state HUD man, state director of HUD here, over to look at one individual's home. That person had taken the skin off of the outside of that mobile home to look under it because he already figured when he got it that it was too hot in there to have any kind of insulation. There was absolutely no insulation under the mobile home skin. None. They guaranteed that there was. At that point we had some real problems conflict. In the end, HUD came around and moved a number of these homes out, reinsulated a number of the homes.

We had some problems with some of the contractors who put in gas heat and we went not to them, but to HUD, of course, because they were HUD contractors. Some of the gas connections inside the homes didn't work, hot water heaters didn't work, and people, rather than go to HUD right off, came to the county. They figured that they would get help from us.

We even had some conflicts with state civil defense. We couldn't at the time, get what we felt was necessary for the protection of the people. We probably overly reacted to a potential mosquito threat. In the end we didn't really have any. All the larvae was washed away by the flood. Even through this year we haven't had any, which is amazing. But the state balked on providing us with funding for spraying mosquitoes. They did the same thing on flies. In that situation, we were absolutely correct. Flies in Madison County after the flood last summer were terrible. There were animal carcasses in some cases that couldn't be removed because they were rotting, decaying far beyond

the stage where you could remov them with choppers or anything else. They told us, "That fly problem is yours." We said, "Well, we certainly wouldn't have had it had the dam not collapsed. But we really didn't get any help from them. In the end we obtained napalm. I got some napalm from an individual who acquired some in St. Anthony, Remington. He gave it to us and we took it out to a number of the carcasses. It was a pellet type of napalm and we poured this over them and we got rid of the carcasses. It burned the carcasses completely out of existence, nothing but ash left. We had tried everything from fuel oil to other things and where we couldn't doze them under, they were in debris piles and napalm was the only thing that worked.

We had numbers of conflicts with the federal agencies. I think the thing that they couldn't understand was how we had people within our staff that really knew as much about the problems as they did and we wanted answers, where we didn't internally have the answers or we especially didn't have the funding. Funding problems during the time after the disaster became more and more critical and serious. The appraisal service provided by the county through IIS has cost the court a hundred and seventy-two thousand dollars and we haven't been reimbursed by the Bureau of Reclamation for one cent. That money was taken out of federal disaster assistance funds that came to the county. They are now to be audited during the next three months and that money was not spent for any purpose that FDAA directed. So it has got to be made up by some one. The county's had a rather severe conflict with the Bureau on this and it has not been resolved to this day.

C: Were there instances a one on one kind of basis, where tempers flared?

M: Yes, we had this. I remember one situation where I got really irritated and then the commissioner did, too. We were upset at the state health man that we had over here. We had numbers of land fills where we had to bury all of the

debris and one of them was at Mill Hollow. That debris was coming in there and they didn't have a D 9 cat up there or anything to level that out at the time. We knew that we had to get one up there, but you just didn't go around and pick up D 9 cats every minute. While we had one enroute, the man from state health went up there and said, "Well, you have to level that out and it has got to be done right now. You have got to push that stuff out and compact it." The only thing that was up there was a patrol, owned by Burggraf Co., rubber tired patrol, and he said to get out there and take care of it. A man we had from the county up there said, "No. That can't be." And he said, "I am the state health man. Now you do it. That is an order." They rolled that Burggraf patrol out on the landfill and flew the two front end tires before they had gone fifty feet. They shredded them, in fact. The tires cost eight thousand dollars apiece for that thing. Then Burggraf came down on the county and said that we had to pay the bill. Well, we called state health and they said, "Look, that had to be done." First thing then, I got into a real confrontation with them on it and finally I said, "Look, we don't want that state health man here if that is the way that he is going to work. He directs the action and then says they are not responsible. The county would not tolerate that." They said, "Well, you jump." Then the chairman of the county commission, Keith Walker, said, "Somebody is going to jump alright. " He then directed me to call General Brooks who was the governor's agent here directing the entire operation for the state. The state health man was recalled the next day to Boise. We never saw him again.

We did have some problems with Mayor Porter. We had to develop some kind of control system on the civil defense operation center. We couldn't get things done if we had half of the population there at once. So we issued passes to get in there and the first four days, I remember telling the national guard

people, and this was on orders from the commission, that the mayor wasn't to leave the place because decisions had to be made for the city that the county commission couldn't make. The mayor finally got mad in a meeting with the federal people and called me Hitler and Ron Moss Stalin and said that we weren't the nicest guys. He said, "Well, I just can't get get out of there." I told him, "If you have got a representative in there when you leave, then fine. If that is what you really want." There wasn't any further problem. He could have done that before, but he felt like he was a prisoner up there for the duration. After it was over, everything was wonderful and Hitler and Stalin terms were sort of a joke that he used, affectionately. But it wasn't before that time.

The pressure was tremendous. It was lucky, really fortunate that the staff we had up there with the commissioners hever had any conflict through the entire period. The authority that was used by the commission, when the commission made a policy or decision, the staff carried it out and that was it. It wasn't questioned. We felt like we didn't have time to question it anyway. Usually the thing was threshed out before a decision was made and we gave the input that we thought was needed in terms of recommendations to the commission. Things really went smoothly given the magnitude of the problems. I am still amazed at how well we did. We had problems later with the deputy sheriff's compensation and it still hasn't been completely resolved. In fact, I understand that it is to go to court on the thirteenth of this month. That issue involved FDAA as well as the law enforcement planning commission, and how these special deputies were to be compensated and at what level. There were conflicts there all the way through, from about the first of September.

C: Were you ever on hand when one of the casualties in the flood was recovered?

M: Yes. I was in the situation at Sugar City. I had just arrived over there when one of the bodies was recovered just west of Sugar City. I can recall at the

time the young man that was fishing, his body was recovered and brought over. It was brought into civil defense. They just stopped there with the body and they had a temporary morgue set up. I can recall his parents came in at that point and that was very sad and very sorrowful.

I remember the paper calling me from Idaho Falls saying, right after this, that they had heard we really weren't giving the statistics out on loss of life, that we had a secret morgue set up in the high school or somewhere else like a Ricks College storage building and that we weren't going to release it because we didn't want panic among the people. I kind of thought that was funny for a minute and then I began to think about it and I said, "No." I called them back down there and really let them know. Because if people would have really believe that kind of thing, we would have had more problems than we could have coped with. There were all kinds of rumors. We had reports of bodies all the time during that first two weeks. A fellow from Idaho Falls reported that he had seen two bodies and where they were and so that word came back over to the coroner's office and the police. They came to me and said, "We have got this report." I said, "Let's go check it out." We got there to check it out and couldn't find a thing. Finally, we got ahold of the guy in Idaho Falls and he yes that it had been there. So we went back out. Nothing again. Then we got a hold of the guy's bishop, they were up doing volunteer work. He called him in and he admitted that he had made up the the whole thing. All of the deaths that occurred were Fremont County people. We had a really limited contact in our civil defense headquarters office, except where the bodies were recovered in Madison County itself and they were brought south rather than taken to St. Anthony.

C: When did you get to work on your own home?

M: I never did. My wife and the volunteer worked on the house. I guess that the water stayed in our house for about six days. My good wife and some voluteers

finally got it pumped out. We really had some good people come in to help. A Catholic priest got them in here. We had tight security on everything. It was rough to get people in who really didn't have any business in here. He told a little white lie and said that he had some parish people up here and wanted to get in, just so he could get in to help. He was from Jackson, Wyoming. He helped my wife and some of the volunteers from Burley came down and helped. We also had some from the Mennonite group. The were from Coeur d'Alene and came in and helped clear out and clean out my home. It was really a mess. Everything was stacked in mud piles. The first time I saw that place, there were just big mud piles all the way around the house where everything had been dumped from inside. I had a pole fence around the house that I had bolted together and stained, it is one of the things that saved my house because there were timbers, two and a half to three feet around, that when the first water hit, they had wedged against that fence and broke the force of the water. The water moved around both sides of the house and it really didn't structurally damage the house severely. There were telephone poles and debris of all kinds still out there in piles around about one third of the east side of the house where the water hit the worst.

I ended up at civil defense headquarters usually preparing the agenda for the meetings about quarter after six every morning and I never got out of there until usually about seven at night after the first couple of weeks. We lived in a college apartment, thanks to the college, until the end of June and then we moved back into our home without carpeting or anything or any rooms downstairs. We had the basement completely finished and almost everything down there was destroyed. We had to go back to the studs, and then we had to replaster and everything upstairs. But we still found it was great just to get back in. Then I would leave about six o'clock and get back at 7:30 and whatever had been done would have been done. That was it.

C: As you got into the process of filing claim for damage to your personal property, did you have any problems?

M: I had some problems in compiling a list. I don't think that really there are very many people that ever got everything on that list that they lost. A lot of the things that we had downstairs that would float, floated out the windows and then many of the other personal possessions in the house were out in these big piles of mud. So we had to try and sift through the mud piles and list the things that had been lost. With the bureau, I had some problems once I had submitted my claim. The verifier provided me with twenty-three hundred dollars for new electrical work and they had to rewire the entire first floor. I had made estimates using county cost books. My figures were forty-two hundred dollars and then the contractor who had originally built my home came back to rebuild and his bid was thirty-eight hundred. I went down to the claims officer and checked back through this whole thing. When I did, he agreed with me. So we got the right amount in there and I was compensated. But I had problems after I was given the money for my claim. I need to submit a new suplimental claim now. I am just in that process because by drainfield went out in the fall and we dug it up and the weight of the water had completely collapsed the whole drainfield. I think that I have five neighbors that are all in that process now.

My cement patio has cracked and the garage floor has cracked and the garage apron has developed cracks. I did salvage a couple of fishing rods and I thought I just had some problems with finish on them. The doggone chemicals in the water ate the fiberglass through so I have got to put them on the claim and then the telephone company put three different telephone lines into my home. Finally, they left them on top of the ground because the chemicals in the water would eat right through the coating on the cable and my phone line would go. They had to dig up these different times. The first time and the

the last time they had to dig up my yard to get the phone line in. I had a sprinkling system throughout the whole place and estimated what it would cost again to replace this and they went along with that. The problem was they didn't go along with my original claim with grass sodding. Some claims they did, they provided sodding, others they didn't. On mine they didn't. Then the sprinkling system, the plastic hose, chemicals had eaten through that and that wasn't reflected in my claim so when I began to use the prepared system this spring, the whole thing was gone. I need to include this in a supplemental claim.

Actually, working with those people most of the time in my own situation and with the county, too, they are really human and pretty good to work with. It was just in some areas that they really thought at times they knew more than the person submitting the claim. In some cases, they did. There were a couple of things I had in there where, you know, they pointed out to me they didn't figure that was quite right on. I did some more checking and found out original estimates by some of the people who were going to do the work were a bit off. That was fine. I appreciated that. I think that in most areas they were flexible and they were pretty good to work with, really, considering the situation.

C: Kent, throughout this experience was there any time that you felt anything super-natural about anything.

M: I have to admit, really, that after the flood one of the things that I felt was extraordinary was the spirit of cooperation, and really the high morale of our people. It was unbelievable, eating over at the Manwaring Center, you would go in there and you just didn't see people that looked knocked down, drag out and just down trodden. They had smiles on their faces and everybody considered that we are all in the same baot and if this is the way it is, we are going to make the best of what we have and we are expected to do this as

far as our belief in God, we are expected to come up with something in the end. Our homes and everything should be better than what we had before and we are going to be darn humble about it. I think a lot of people felt this, and I do, that this was a humbling experience, that we learned quite a few lessons that way. It could have been far worse. If this had happened in the middle of the night, or if it had happened in the middle of January, our loss of life would have been just terrible. There really would have been no way to prevent that kind of thing.

It was a good lesson on humility, learning to be humble and learning to work together and to be interdependent with the people without having to reap that grim punishment where such extensive loss of life is usually present.

C: Did you support the building of the dam in the first place?

M: I was rather reluctant on that because I felt that wildlife losses, for example, were rather extensive. Many people thought that they weren't but they were rather extensive, a deer heard, a small elk herd, they were going to be detrimentally affected and I felt like that really as far as the public was concerned and I expressed this to the Standard-Journal. I could accept the building of the dam only on the basis of the people realizing what they were going to lose, in contrast to what they were going to gain. I didn't feel either, that the overall economic benefits to the total populace on a cost benefit ratio were going to be what was anticipated. I think that given the energy crunch since, that there would have been more advantages there than I would have anticipated at the time. I would have to admit, that with people knowing what they were getting into that way, realizing the loss, I went along with it. I didn't actively push the dam at all. I think looking now, as far as if there was an increased cost benefit ratio, were the dam would be built again, I would only support it, and I could only support it if the dam design

were changed, if it were a cement structure that was developed and the site analysis were extensive. We just couldn't go for another one like we had. I think really, there is more optimism and more acceptance of a dam for the future with these kind of safeguards than a lot of people even believe. There is a variable separatist group that says, "No, we won't have any kind of a dam." But I don't think that they are great in number. I think that people would accept a dam again were these safeguards taken.

C: Did you have any premonition that the dam would not last?

M: No, I didn't. It was really interesting that first day. I talked to Commissioner Keith Walker and he said, "You know, my wife and I were riding the night before past Sugar City." Keith noted, "We looked up there and I said, 'Gee, what would it be if that thing broke?'" Myself, I trusted the technical expertise of the Bureau and I had no premonition of anything going wrong.

C: Are you still involved in any official way in the rebuilding effort?

M: I am still the operations chief and I am involved as economic development director for the county. We anticipated that after six or eight months of this thing we would be pretty well wrapped up. In so far as especially the Federal Disaster Assistance Administration paying all these bills now for construction efforts, rebuilding, we still don't have it licked. We have got an audit that is going to begin now and it is going to take some months to finish.

A claim will be made to the Bureau in some areas since FDAA now has said they are not going to pay the bill. We are having to prepare claims on those things right now. We thought that we would be wrapping up and everything would be taken care of. It just doesn't work that fast. Especially the paper work on it. No one gets a better perspective of the federal structure and how large it is and how difficult to resolve some of the knottier, thorny problems after working directly in it.

C: Do you have any direct communication with the Secretary of the Interior?

M: We have had and even again two weeks ago. Commissioner Walker called me this week and said that the commission in its last meeting had discussed presenting information relative to the Idaho Investigation services directly to the Secretary. We discussed this with Secretary Andrus' personal secretary and the Commissioner told me to prepare the data so that we could go to Washington. He asked me if I would go with him during the latter part of this month. In the next weeks, that is one of the things that we will be doing, making a personal appeal to the secretary.

According to the information that we have now, the Bureau is not going to defray at least part of the appraisal service costs. We felt from the very beginning that this was critical service because people, many of them older people, had no way to turn as far as preparing these claims. They were very difficult to prepare, time consuming, laborious. Some of these people who are older just were confused to the point where they needed help of this type. Even people with differences in regard to the value of their property with the Bureau, younger people, they didn't have any way to back them up. The Bureau first said, "Look, go out and get a contractor to tell us how much the service is going to cost." Then the minute that the contractors inflated the cost figures, the Bureau said, "Well, we won't accept them." Many people in the county were without any ability then to discern what really they had to use as figures on reconstruction. Finally, we used Idaho Investigation Services and the Bureau approved of that. Then the Bureau never developed any payment schedule that they came through on in deferring the costs, so we will go back and see Secretary Andrus. At least it is scheduled now that we will be at the end of the month.

C: You are also involved in the development of a park complex along the river, are you not?

M: Yes.

C: What does that entail?

M: I applied for a grant with the Secretary of the Interior last fall before Secretary Andrus took office, a contingency fund grant to develop a campground, a lake complex where the county had extracted gravel in an area that would total about seventy acres. We really didn't have much of a chance of getting that grant. But we thought that it was worth applying for and, given our situation, the secretary approved our contingency fund application. I am to meet later this afternoon with an ajoining property owner. We have deeds now on all of the property and are beginning construction on that. At the same time, we have just now, I was told this afternoon, that we will receive Economic Development Administration funding for a five hundred and sixty thousand dollar project that we are applying for in renovation of the courthouse because of what happened during the dam collapse, additional police wing on the courthouse for the city of Rexburg. They have approved monies for the county to use, but not the specific project itself. We are sending in that application tomorrow and we anticipate that we will have that.

C: So this process is really an ongoing sort of thing?

M: I felt with the county, Dave, that probably there, county government generally, the greatest problem they have is they just don't have any full time administrators. County board of commissioners, that has been like ours, really faithful in the kind of money that they receive, three hundred and ninety dollars a month where especially the chairman of the commission was working full time for nine months on this thing. They don't have the time and they don't get paid for making administrative decisions and for writing the grant requests and those kinds of things. Probably in the end we need a county manager, someone down there who can coordinate the administrative efforts for the county. But we

have not had one and after the dam's collapse, three of us down there either part-time or in the summer now here with most of us pretty well full-time. It is taking every bit of time we have had and if you let up, if you miss one opportunity in areas of development, reconstruction, you don't get it back. It is gone. We felt like the people of Madison County deserve more than that.

C: Do you think that there was any kind of sympathy factor involved in governmental funding coming into the area?

M: I think so. On these EDA grants, this title nine grant that I mentioned with the county courthouse, there just isn't sympathy, and EDA's really is a tough agency to deal wtih. But one of their most critical criteria in awarding the grants has to do with unemployment factor. Because of the dam's collapse for that particular period our unemployment factor here, of course, was tremenduously high. Now that has turned around to some extent, especially in construction. There has been a lot of construction here. But some people who were unemployed because of this put a severe strain even on the state unemployment insurance fund. Now the state, the governor is pressing a claim for the Bureau on the loss of that money. So now when EDA says, "Well look, we are using this criteria, where do you fit?" We can show that we deserve the money and we need the money to push employment. The kind of grants that we are getting from them, especially. We have got another one through the Teton Dam Recovery Organization that, for the five county area, will total about 12.4 billion dollars. But all of them, all of these grants, were after push people into employment situations, on a rapid basis to stimulate the employment and the economy. They are really just the kind of thing that we need, both to employ people here and in order to develop public works projects.

C: Are there any moral lessons that can be drawn from the disaster?

M: I think two of them, maybe three. One, you need to be prepared. Those who were prepared have far less to fear. Maybe a rather ironic one, learning a lesson. Morally, if you learn that you don't know everything that you really thought you knew. My good neighbor, I am reminded, said, "I learned one thing." He is seventy-two and fairly well fixed as a farmer. He thought he was prepared to handle a lot of things, but he said, "I really learned during this that something I kind of always believed in, hard work never hurt anybody. Also that steel and iron float." But I guess the other thing is that no matter still how well prepared you are food storage-wise or anything else, you learn that you are still dependent on the good Lord. Keith Walker said, "Here I had a herd of cattle, an extensive number of cattle. I had all my food storage and I had everything. I thought that I was really prepared in that sense." The way that Keith ended up being best prepared wasn't the way that he thought, relative to commodities and a years food supply. The cattle herd was gone, all the food stoarge was gone, everything else but his ability to deal and work with people. He wasn't challenged that way, the way that he might have been. I think these are moral lessons that you learn. You learn that no man is an island. In this situation everybody stood together or nobody stood at all.

C: Were there any humorous incidents that you can recall?

M: I just thought of two quick ones. The one it was quite humorous but rather destructive. The high school had one area in it that didn't get extensive water damage. I recall that right after the flood they had a water tanker truck heading up the hill by the high school over at the hospital site to water down that area. I think that there were about five thousand gallons of water in that thing and a new operator driver in the truck. He got half way up the hill and tried to shift gears and couldn't get the truck in gear in any way,

shape, nor form. The truck began to roll back down the hill backwards. The driver jumped out of the truck and ran back of the truck shouting at everybody to get out of the way. One fellow coming up the hill in a Volkswagen didn't make it fast enough and the truck went right over the VW with the fellow still in it. Luckily, he didn't get a scratch. The truck proceeded through the parking lot and through the high school wall into the one room that hadn't been damaged by the flood. All the valves smashed on the back of the truck and all five thousand gallons of water dumped right in the middle of those people working in the school.

The other thing that was quite funny at the time. On the second day in the chopper going over the dam and the chairman of the commission and myself and a couple of other people and we had one of the construction company superintendents with us and he was the only one in the group that was a smoker. But I can recall we were going up right near the dam, right up the water channel. This was only the day after and there was still a lot of water left. The pilot said to the chairman of the commission, "Sir, I think that we are on fire. I can smell smoke, we are on fire. I think we are going to have to set her down." The superintendent of this construction company had been smoking a cigarette in the helicopter. It is against all rules to be smoking a cigarette in one of those things. He had the cigarette cupped in his hand down by his side and nobody had seen the cigarette. The pilot of the chopper thought that we were all goners. He started to drop that plane right down the middle of that river channel. The chairman of the commission said, "Hell, don't put it down here or we are gone. Set it down over there in the wheat field, if anything." "No sir, I think that we are on fire. We have got to put it down." We were kind of looking around and trying to smell everywhere to see what it was. Finally, I looked back there and there was this guy next to me and I could see the little

bit of smoke curling up from behind his hand. I tapped the commissioner on the shoulder and told the fellow, "That's just the superintendent back there with a cigarette. We are all right." By then at least the guy had moved the chopper over to the point where we were over a wheat field to put it down. But for a minute there, he thought that we were all going down.

C: Is there anything else that you can think of that would be pertinent to this?

M: I think that I have probably taken far too much time. The aftermath of the dam collapse was a real trying time. Maybe in conclusion, Dave, you know the humor of everybody throughout all this was just unbelievable. We kind of felt that if you couldn't laugh and smile about it just a little bit, you would just end up crying, so you just as well roll with the punches a little bit and laugh.

C: Thanks, Kent. I appreciate this opportunity to interview you.

M: Thank you, Dave.