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Name of Informant James D. Taylor

Address Vermillion, South Dakota

Date of Interview June 16, 1972

Name of Researcher Stephen R. Ward

Others Present John Watterson

Location of Interview Vermillion, South Dakota

Added Notes _____

Subject Headings under which you feel this interview should be filed:

Escape from Keystone to Mt. Rushmore; Spent the night at Mt. Rushmore pavillion;

Effects of the flood in Keystone and Echo Valley.

Demographic Information on Informant

Age _____ Sex _____ County Clay

Socio-economic status _____

Occupation _____

Education _____

Religion _____

Date of Arrival of Family in South Dakota _____

Where? _____

From Where? _____

Number of Moves in South Dakota _____ Reasons for moves _____

A. Where...where..you going to want me to start?

Q. Well, I'll...we'll just get you started and...We're talking with James D. Taylor of the University of South Dakota, June 16, 1972. I'm Steve Ward and John Watterson is also present. And right now we're looking at a map of a geological survey which is titled Mount Rushmore, South Dakota, and the position we're looking on...at is west of Keystone, approximately two miles on...on Battle Creek, which, as we determined fairly well...that we're somewhere within the range between Range 1 ..excuse me...Section 1 of Range 5, Township 2 south, Range 5 east, Township 2 south, or Range.....or excuse me...Section 6 of Range 6 east of Township 2 south. So we are attempting to locate, then, an area called Echo Valley, which, I think, we can pinpoint later. I think, Jim, probably the best thing to do is to start out by where you were on Friday, June 9 and exactly what kinds of experiences you had.

A. Well, I think I can kind of build up to this. There were six of us in the party--my wife, Sharon, and I, our two kids, Mary and Tom ages 13 and 10, my nephew, David West from Sioux Falls aged 12, and my mother--in-law, Mrs. Shelby Toome, from Fullington, Iowa, and one small dog. And we were in Ra... we went to the Rapid City area because my wife was attending a meeting ironically enough on "Death and Dying" along with quite a few other nurses and some doctors, other medical people; they were meeting at Stevens High School. So we arrived on Thursday and stayed over night in the cabin at Echo Valley.

Q. This would be Thursday, the eighth?

A. Thursday, the eighth, right. The next morning, we took her into Rapid, came

back, picked up the rest of the family and we just toured the area. And it was beautiful weather, except it was very hot and very, very humid for the Hills. We had to run the air conditioner in the car all the time. We picked my wife up at three in the afternoon from Stevens High and in the meantime, we had packed a picnic for our cooler and we went to Lake Pactola for a picnic. We arrived and the clouds were building up, and they had forecast general thundershowers, but nothing serious.

Q. Did you sta...excuse me, did you stay the night in Echo Valley on June eighth, Thursday?

A. June eighth, Thursday, that's right. Now this is Friday, the...and so this... we're about 4:35 in the afternoon having our picnic. The rain started at Pactola and it's quite heavy with quite a bit of lightning and everything, and so we piled in the car and decided to drive back to the cabin. We drove back by way of, I think it's Highway 16 that comes back north of this area and it connects with a "Y" onto 16A and comes on down toward Keystone, I think...I think it's here on the map here. Right, this is 16 (looking at the map). Well, what we did was on the way back, we noticed that the rain was getting very heavy, there was quite a bit of hail on the ground. We didn't see it hail, but there was hail on the ground. In fact, they debated in the car whether it was hail or snow. So...and then...

Q. This is around (Hartesy) Park?

A. This is...we...right. As we were coming right up here towards the "Y". And we...by the time we got up here we decided it was too early to go to the cabin, and so we thought this isn't going to last, so we wanted to go to Rock-

erville so deep we were afraid to cross it. It was just drainage water, it wasn't a creek or anything. So we left Rockerville and came back on 16 through the "Y" and then down the road...

Q. Now, through the "Y" here, that's where 16...

A. Connects with 16A, right, right. And let's see, this is north isn't it, yeah. So it'd be north of Keystone. So then we drove down to Keystone across the bridge here, and then parked in the town 'cause we wanted to buy a few things. It's still early, we figured.

Q. This is about what time...about...about five o'clock?

A. Oh, this is...no...by this time it was probably, which..._____ after horsing around up there, and sitting on the roadside, I suppose it was gettin' near eight o'clock by that time. And so we shopped, and the people were just beginning to close their stores and so forth, and getting ready to head for home. So it was between eight and nine, I suppose. We bought a few things and I decided,..it was raining pretty hard...and I decided I'd better call the (Maises) and see if it was all right to come out. So I...

Q. These are the people that own Echo Valley?

A. These are the people that own Echo Valley, yes. Jerry (Maise). And so after a half-hour of futile attempts, I finally got through the phone, and...

Q. Why, why?

A. Line busy...probably party line or something, I really don't know, but the line was busy. But we finally go through to him and they didn't seem alarmed, and thought it was all right just to go on out. I talked to Mrs. (Maise), so...Now, by...at this time, it was...it was very dark, just like...just

like midnight. But it...around that time it should have been lighter there, with this Daylight Savings Time and everything and so...Well, we got in the car and we started up the road along Battle Creek, west, and we came to the first crossing which would be (looking at the map) right in your section whatever it is...

Q. Section 8.

A. Which would be about what, an eighth of a mile and a quarter of a mile up this road...it's crossing that, where the 1880 Train tracks cross on a trestle above the road and make a sharp left right angle turn and go across the... and then the stream runs under this. Well, the water was coming through the trestle and over the road...over the bridge...and we debated whether to go on and go through or not, and my daughter and my wife were insistent that we not and I said, "Oh, I'll get out of the car and check it." And I opened the door of the car and water was running into the car and I decided against it then. We...(laughter) much to the relief of everyone else. And so, we turned the car around, which took a lot of jockeying to get it turned around, and that road was...

Q. Because the road now was pretty well covered with water?

A. Well, the road...the water was running on both sides of the road and coming up over the road right by the trestle, and we were pretty close to it. So... so we backed up and turned around, came back to Keystone and went right straight up the road toward Rushmore--16A--up until we got to the south edge of Keystone, which would be right in this area here (looking at the map again). Now this is the junction, let's see...this is where Grizzly Bear

Creek comes down...We went first to the Four Presidents Motel, which is located...I don't know how you can identify this...but it's located just north of the junction of Grizzly Bear Creek where it runs up next...either next to or under the road, 16A. We went to the Four Presidents Motel and they didn't have any accommodations for us, but they called over to the Miner Motel, which is just across the other side of Grizzly Bear Creek. And they did have, so we drove around and checked into the Miner Motel. Now, there are...there's a set of tourist's cabins between the Four Presidents Motel and the Miner Motel, which sit right along the edge of Grizzly Creek. All right, we checked in and I'm not sure of the time, but it was probably around nine o'clock by this time--between nine and 9:30, in through there. The family... we were fairly wet because we didn't have rain gear. So the family got their baths and we were getting all settled down and watching the TV and learning for the first time that apparently something was happening in Rapid City. And...then the power went off; and so...complete blackout. Everything went off. So we had my son's flashlight, so by the use of his flashlight, we managed to go ahead and get to bed. Well, we were all settled down and I heard quite a bit of activity outside. So I got curious and looked out the window and I could see water by the lights...by the spotlights from cars on the other side, which possibly were Game and Fish people or State... or National Park people or Highway Patrol or sheriff, I don't know who they were--but some cars over there that had spotlights were shining across and you could see by the lights of those spotlights that there was a lot of water, and apparently this water was coming down the drainage ditch down the

Rushmore Road. And then you could hear a roar and this roar, apparently, was the water coming down Grizzly Creek right next...right then off to our right, which would have been just south of the motel. And we heard people screaming and everything, and so I opened the door to see what was the matter. And just about that time, the owner of the motel was coming down the line banging on doors and he was asking everybody to go up to the second floor of the motel. And it was still raining quite hard and it was quite dark and there were several older people that were having a little difficulty climbing, but they got there all right. And we could see from up there by the shining flashlights and by the activity on the road and a few car headlights and so forth that, apparently, water was coming clear up into the parking lot behind the motel and began to smell propane gas, becoming very strong smell of propane gas, so we asked everyone not to smoke or light anything. The screaming, apparently was coming from the tourist's cabins. There were a group of students, at least student-age boys and girls over there that, apparently, were instructors for cheerleading and they were on their way to Wyoming conducting cheerleading classes for...probably out at the University, I don't know where. And they were over in the tourist's cabins and they had abandoned their cabin and had climbed onto the roof. And Grizzly Creek, of course, was...had come up and was invading the cabins and by the lights of one man's headlights...we got his car backed out so he could shine over there and see what was happening...we could see that they were, apparently, all right, but the water was quite swift around those cabins, so they were quite concerned about't. And right in front of the motel was a home and parked

next to the home was a motor home--I don't know what brand, but like...like a Winnebago--and the water was up around those things, but...

Q. Up around what...would you say three feet, four feet?

A. Oh, no. I...it's hard to say, I would say possibly two to three feet, because the motor home was not inundated, but you couldn't see the wheels. In other words, it was up over the wheels, but not up too high on it. The home, itself, I'm sure it had water up to the first floor, but I don't think it was above the first floor level, I doubt it; but it mighta had a little water on the first floor, but not much--an inch or so. Well, finally the water receded a little, enough so that we could see that the people from the house then were brought over to the motel and from the motor home, they brought 'em over to the motel. And then we found that the...the patrol, or whoever it was out in cars out on the highway, were able to come in...into our motel because the culvert and driveway were still there. Now, there're a lot of logs and debris and stuff they pushed out of the way, and the driveway was eroded some but not seriously enough so that we couldn't get out. But we noticed that there's a bar just south--which would be up just a little bit from the Miner Motel--and we noticed that it was all right, but the bridge had been washed out between it and the road so they couldn't get out of there. And...well, at any rate, we went back down into our unit below and we weren't there five minutes when they were pounding on the doors saying everybody has to evacuate to Mount Rushmore. So this alarmed us because we thought...we were relieved, we thought it was all over. Now, we thought well, maybe there's more coming, so we weren't going to argue. So we went

out to the car, but there was a truck behind my car that had, apparently, skidded or, apparently, had...had some...some of the driveway eroded out, and it was tipped to its side and, therefore, it could have blocked my car. At least the patrolman said, "Don't bother with your car, you go ride with someone else." He said, "There's a washout in back of it." So I didn't argue with him, I just...Well, there were six of us, so to try to find one car where all six could ride we thought was going to be a problem. And he wanted to split us up and my mother-in-law was frantic, she was not going to let us be split up at this time, 'cause we...then we would have worried about each other. So all this time carting this blasted dog under our arms, we were...we saw a...an older man and woman climbing into a white Volvo, so all six of us piled into the back seat of a Volvo and (laughter) and the whole thing. They were pinned in and they couldn't move, so I had to get out and there was a log under his car and I pulled that out, and by wading through the mud and pushing him, we got him back to the parking lot...

Q. Were you dressed by this time?

A. My daughter was barefooted and in a pair of shorts. The rest of 'em were dressed and I was dressed. We were all wet, but we were dressed. And... with the exception of her and her bare feet. Now then, I jumped in the car and he drove the Volvo all the way up the Mount Rushmore Road. We made it fine up there and once we were up there, it was still dark, but we didn't fear for our lives any more at least. And so we walked up to the Pavilion. Now the Pavilion up on Mount Rushmore, I'm sure everybody knows what it is, but it's right up here--it's the government pavilion. And, of course, there

was no power there either. We got in there and there were quite a few people there. And as time went on, more and more people came in. I think we were probably there by eleven o'clock at night--between eleven o'clock and midnight I'm sure we were there. I...I don't recall now exactly what time it was. It was cool...it was a cool night; it wasn't...I don't remember it being windy really at all, but it was a cool night--of course, raining still. And I'm not sure who these people are that man this pavilion, I think they're federal employees--Park Service or something--and they were just marvelous. They did everything they could. These little gals that worked up there and so forth, were just being very accommodating and there wasn't much they could do--just give us dry sanctuary--but they scrounged blankets up from somewhere, and I understand later, from their own dormitories. So they must have just grabbed their own blankets, plus some that were taken up from the motels and so on. So they gave people blankets, as many as they could--particularly children and so on. So we just sat there until...and as time went on, the National Guard trucks or some trucks--I think they're National Guard trucks--would bring people in that they found or rescued. They did get these kids off the tourist's cabins all right, because they came in. And they were bringing people from the Grizzly...various Grizzly...Grizzly Bear Creek camping grounds because I heard people talking about losing campers and things, wading through water and so forth in the Grizzly Creek camping grounds. And from various areas in...around Keystone...and then people from Keystone, I remember talking to several owners of shops there...in Keystone. And then also, people from the other motels, the Four Presidents and heard them talking about how they

were up on the second floor, too, but debris was hitting their motel. And all their cars were swept out of the parking lot there. And they heard windows breaking and felt the motel shaking so they were...(both talking at once)..

Q. Shaken off its ground.

A. I believe it did. I read this later, but I think they actually feared they were going to lose that motel. And when the water did recede a little bit, then, I think, they got those people out, too. Because...and the people from Keystone out. Now, my wife is a nurse and oh, I suppose it was about one o'clock--coulda been possibly 1:30--they came through asking if there was a doctor in the place and there wasn't, so she volunteered the information that she was a nurse so they asked her to come with them. And I found out later that there was an elderly man that they had drug out of the water somewhere from his camper who had lost his wife and was having what appeared to be a coronary at the time. And so she went down; she told me later they had a very nice First Aid station in the Pavilion. Two hospital beds and oxygen, compresses, and this sort of thing, peroxide for cleaning wounds and so on. So she spent much of the night down there and as they would bring people in--some of them would be cut and some would be kind of in shock, and some...she spent most of the night just patching people up and...the more serious cases, they'd get an ambulance up from somewhere, I assume...I assume Custer, I don't know...evacuate those that were really in bad shape out. The man with a heart attack was taken by ambulance, I'm not sure. So that's about the extent of the night. Finally, daybreak came--such as it was. You couldn't see the faces, but...it was all foggy out. And, well I'd say about four in the morn-

ing they did bring us some milk and later on, a slab of bread with a piece of cold roast beef on it, which tasted pretty good by that time.

Q2. How long had it been since you had...

A. Well, we'd had dinner the night before--the picnic--but we hadn't eaten anything since that picnic at five. And with the exception of a piece of...a bag of carmel corn, which we still had with us--we were thinking we might have to ration that out, we didn't know how long that was going to last. But the restaurant--I can't think of the restaurant that's up on Mount Rushmore--but they, apparently, were getting supplies from there. Well, at daybreak then...then I noticed a bunch of National Guard boys came up pretty tired and bedraggled, I believe, and they took 'em over and fed 'em at that restaurant; then they took all of us over and...we went in through the kitchen and they...the people at the restaurant simply just contributed food and fed us all the breakfast that we wanted. We were tired and so we didn't feel like eating a whole lot. But it helped...still dragging that dog--even through the kitchen--and every cook in the place eyed us as though they were...it was the most horrible thing they'd ever seen--dragging a dog through the kitchen which violates all the laws of the state, but no one was paying too much attention to that at that time. We were afraid to let her go for fear she'd get lost in all that, 'cause there were about three or four dogs up there and there're two German shepherds tied up outside and a Bassett inside and I don't know what all kind of dogs. So...

Q. How many people would you estimate were in this pavilion?

A. The pavilion? I think it started out there were around 200, but I think there

were closer to 400 before the night was over...in the last estimates it was about 400. See, there were...we had our level filled with people laying on the floors and in the chairs and everything. And then in the basement they had quite a bit of space, too, and it was filled with people. So, it was... and then the water was contaminated they were afraid, so we couldn't use any water. They brought coffee along...around...I don't know where they got the water for it. And I think they boiled the coffee over a fireplace, didn't taste very good and it wasn't warm and I...my wife commented, for instance, that one little gal that held the flashlight for her while she was trying to clean out wounds and so forth was just terrific. She was trying to talk her into taking a nursing program out here now, but the girl thinks she's had enough nursing to last her a lifetime (laughter). But there was no hysteria of any kind, people were extremely cooperative and actually very courteous. And even people who had lost loved ones seemed to not...maybe it just hadn't hit 'em yet. With the exception of one girl who couldn't find her sister, I don't recall anybody weeping or anything like that. So...

Q. Well, then...what did you do, then, the following day?

A. Well, the next morning we found out that our car was okay. And so another man was going to drive to the motel--the Miner--that was also staying at the Miner...drive down and pick up his belongings and then leave. So I rode down with him and got the car out. Now when we arrived down there, I could see by the light of day that there was quite a bit of damage in the area. The helicopter pad was okay; but between the helicopter pad and the Miner Motel there was an...a drainage area for the, I think possibly for the Mount Rushmore Road

and all that, it drains down there...it had eroded badly through there and taken out part of the dirt around the big culvert and had lifted pieces of the road so that it was up at an angle and broken up. Grizzly Creek was... had eroded badly and there was very sheer drop-offs where it'd eaten back and eaten clear to the...it had eaten clear to the southern..to the foundation on the south side of the Miner Motel. In fact, it had undercut a little of the room in back. But it hadn't, apparently, done any structural damage to it. That might have been another reason why they evacuated us. We didn't...I didn't go any further down than...the National Guard had a blockade there and they let me through to get my car, but I knew they didn't...wouldn't appreciate my going around sightseeing, so I didn't attempt to go any further down.

Q. Now, your son took these pictures, is that correct?

A. Yes, he...see, we went from...we left then and went around the back...the south...the southern side of Mount Rushmore and went to Custer and washed up, bought a few clothes, and checked into a motel and rested up. And then we got a hold of our families to let 'em know we were all right. And then Sunday, we drove up here to try to retrieve our things or see what had happened. And that's...so we came down 16A again, and this is where we took these pictures. This shows that the main bridge on 16A leading into Keystone was completely washed out (looking at the pictures). This is where the bridge area was, as you can see...I mean, it's kinda hard to tell, but this is looking up the main street of Keystone, as you can see; so the bridge would've gone around over there. Now the National Guard were...and this would be Grizzly

Creek _____, but this is where it would be. Apparently, the water was quite deep at the juncture of Grizzly and Battle creek. Now there's a little place where the 1880...where they have an 1880 Train information booth...

Q. Yeah, I remember that...

A. Now, there was a log sticking inside of this. The post office, I looked in and it was covered with mud quite high, I didn't really est...I...I think the water...the water level was above my head. I think I could've reached it if I'd stood on my tiptoes. So that'll give some idea...probably the water was six feet deep in the...the post office approximately. Now I would assume that's probably from these two creeks coming together. There was water coming down through Keystone on the road and I think that was do...did most of the damage, too. Now this is Keystone, of course. I think that's what did most of the damage to those stores, 'cause I don't...it...it didn't look like structural damage to the stores, but it looked like there's a lot of just plain water damage. Now, old Keystone I know nothing about. It's further downstream; I didn't get down there to see it. Now the road leading back up into Battle Creek Canyon then, as you can see in this picture, was just gone. This is a piece of it right here and it's...it was just wiped out clean. Everything was wiped out clear down to the rocks here, as you can see. We found a man there, an elderly man by the name of Mr. Kingsbury. He's a carpenter. One of his...his son-in-law just gra...his name is Dale Wadlin just graduated from our M.B.A. program this year, and I didn't realize this until I talked to him at the time, but he said he had built...had helped build

those cabins and he thought he could get us back there to see if our things were there. So we went back up and through the "Y" and--which is west on Highway 16--until we found a road. (Looking at the map) now I don't know, this might be the road right back here. That leads back down and connects with this road that runs along Battle Creek. So we drove down that way and came back in here. I don't know how far along we got, but I don't imagine we got over too much further than right about in here. And we found the roads were again washed out. So we parked the car and we walked along the trestle and the road and where we could...until we got down a little ways down into here, and I think probably it was around in this area because the canyons were kinda closing in on us here, and as you can see on this map, it looks like that that's...and then it became obvious that it was going to be very, very difficult to walk any further and my mother-in-law...it was a very hot day and my mother-in-law looked like she was getting pretty warm and we didn't want to take a chance on her having a heat stroke or something and there we'd be, back there with a sick person on our hands. So we just...we walked back to the car and drove home (laughter)...abandoned the effort.

Q. To pinpoint that generally that would be in Section 1, Township 2 south... Range 5 east.

A. That's probably as far...that's probably as close as we walked. We probably walked within a mile to a mile and...or to...from half a mile to mile of our cabins. If we'd...if it'd just been the younger crowd along, I'm sure we woulda made it through. Now, I talked to Mr. Maise this morning, this is what; June...

Q. A week later...

A. Yeah, all right, a week later. This morning, at noon, he called me collect. I'd called out there and left our number with Civil Defense staff, he'd called because we couldn't get through to them. He called me this morning and said that there were two, two and a half feet of water...or two to two and a half feet of water had run through the cabin, but the cabin was okay and our stuff was there and was okay. A dresser tipped over and dumped the radio into the water, but other than that...clothes looked in pretty good shape. So he got everything out and took it up to another cabin and kinda washed it off and let it dry off. And he said that the water cut a considerable amount of land out below their office, quite a deep drop-off now from his office cabin, and that road leading from the...leading up to his office is all out and the road leading out to Battle...to their Echo Valley campground was all out. And they've had to walk to and from town in order to get supplies and communication. And he claimed that right now...that there are heavy...various heavy road building equipment putting a temporary road back through there so that they can get the cars out of people that were back in there. He said that Kemp's Kampground was wiped out, but that their houses were all right...that's a little further downstream. And he was very happy to hear that we were okay, because the last he heard we were going to try to get back, and... (both talking at once)...and so we made arrangements with Milo McCabe who teaches economics here who is going out next week to pick up our stuff, so we're lucky.

Q. Yes, indeed you are. John, did you want to ask anything?

Q2. No.

Q. Okay.

A. We didn't go to Rapid...we didn't make any attempt to go there.

Q. Well, I wouldn't either...well...

A. They had problems enough without us sightseeing.

Q. Very good. Thank you.

END OF INTERVIEW