



Interview with Parker Nielson, Attorney, Author, *Thunder Over Zion: The Life and Times of Chief Judge Willis Ritter*.

Ken Verdoia:

Let's begin and my first question is, how did you first come to know Judge Willis Ritter?

Parker Nielson:

Well, the first time I ever met Judge Ritter was when I was made an assistant United States attorney and under Bill Thurman and he walked me down the hall and introduced me to Judge Ritter, as he did to Judge Christensen, you know both of them. That was how I met both of them. I was an assistant of the United States Attorney there and met them in that capacity.

Ken Verdoia:

You've told me when we talked before that Judge Ritter, if you were not prepared, could be one of the most difficult judges ever to appear before?

Parker Nielson:

Even if you were prepared, he was easily the most difficult judge to appear before in my experience, and as I told you the other day that includes the United States Supreme Court. He was so bright, and he was, you know, when you appeared before Judge Ritter, you better be on your toes because he was always going to be four or five jumps ahead of you. And he had little patience with people who couldn't keep up with him, and that was most of us (laugh).

Ken Verdoia:

One thing that you told me the story about is the way Judge Ritter would manage cases.

Parker Nielson:

Yeah.

Ken Verdoia:

Calling everybody into one place at one time and then plowing right through. Tell me that story of how the judge would use that technique.

Parker Nielson:

Well, the way it would work is, cases would be filed - you know, he wouldn't hold court on any regular

schedule at all. Cases would be filed over a period of weeks, months. They would be pending there, and all of a sudden, he would set up a rule day, and he would notice up every case, both criminal and civil, notice them up on one calendar on one day. You know there might be fifty, sixty cases on that calendar, both criminal and civil, and you had to be ready to go when the case of ahead of you was resolved, one way or the other. And you'd step up there and he'd say "Mr. Nielson, tell me about this case," and you had to explain the case to him and you might have ten seconds to do it. And you'd explain to him what the issue was and, like I say, he was so quick, he was ahead of you and he'd be prepared to rule before you before you got it out of your mouth.

Ken Verdoia:

You told me that one of the principles was that Ritter believed that lawyers should solve problems.

Parker Nielson:

Well, I don't know whether I'm sure that was his belief, but what I said to you actually was that his style of handling the calendar, like I just mentioned, was in my opinion - a good feature of it was that it did force lawyers to settle their cases, which they should do anyway, we all know that, and the reason it would do that is, you know, it was just a difficult experience to have to appear before him and deal with cases in the way that I just described and so a lot of lawyers, especially when you got on a trial calendar, would settle their cases rather than face the uncertainty of appearing before him. And that was especially true with his trial calendars. You might have, like I say, there might be fifty or sixty cases on the calendar and there might not be a single one of them that would actually go to trial. In fact, you know, you've got the biography of Judge Ritter that I wrote and I tell one story in there about the attorney Nick Cotro-Manes. He was on one of Willis Ritter trial calendars and he was several places down the line and his office was just across the street. So he ran over to his office while he waiting for the case to come up, the case was called and he wasn't there and it was a trial case. By the time he got there to handle his case, Judge Ritter had already called the case, he'd examined the jury, and the jury was already in the box, and of course he lost the case. And I remember Nick Cotro-Manes telling me this story himself about how he lost the case and he had to take it up on appeal. And he was arguing to the court of appeals and he was saying, "I don't want to complain, but you know he called the case and I wasn't there and I don't want to complain but he picked the jury and I wasn't there and I don't want to complain but he did the final arguments and I wasn't there." And of course they remanded the case for a new trial. And you would have those kinds of experiences before Judge Ritter and that forced lawyers to do what, as I said the other day, what they ought to do anyway, which was settle their cases.

Ken Verdoia:

What did you like most about Willis Ritter? You knew him, you tried cases before him and then you also spent additional time researching and writing his biography, what did you like most about Willis Ritter?

Parker Nielson:

Well, what I respected most about Judge Ritter was the kind of compassion he had, you know - the common people in life who appeared before him, the disenfranchised, you know, he had extreme compassion for them and they got a fair shake in Judge Ritter's court. And conversely, the influential and powerful people in the community, it wasn't that they were treated unfairly, they were not treated unfairly, but they certainly didn't get the favoritism that they often do in other contexts.

Ken Verdoia:

You mention that on the day you were appointed assistant US attorney, you went down the hall, you met Judge Ritter and then you met Judge Christensen and you put then into the sentence those two names we find so interesting, that seem to be so very, very different - Willis Ritter and A. Sherman Christensen.

Parker Nielson:

Mm-hmm.

Ken Verdoia:

Can you help me understand why these two great men just could not get along?

Parker Nielson:

Well, there were reasons for that, and, you know, let me say that they were both outstanding judges in their own way. They were two very supreme intellects in their own way. But they were so radically different in their approach to the judicial task that there was just natural friction between them for that reason. And also one of the main reasons - this is just speculation on my part, but I always considered that one of the main reasons for the difficulty between them was that Christensen was appointed by - well, he was appointed by the President, of course, but Arthur Watkins, who was the United States Senator from Utah at the time. He was the one who got the second judge appointed and that was Christensen, and he did that for the very purpose of diluting or diminishing the importance of influence of Willis Ritter and Willis Ritter knew that.

Ken Verdoia:

So when Willis Ritter saw Sherman Christensen, he was actually seeing Arthur Watkins in his mind?

Parker Nielson:

Well, I don't know, I don't know whether that would be a fair characterization or not, but, you know, go back to the beginning when Christensen was appointed district judge and Willis Ritter was the chief judge. So, in those days he had control of the calendar. It wasn't like now; when you file a case now, it's by the numbers, you know, it's a lottery sort of a system. But in those days the chief judge had control of the calendar. So Willis Ritter would take all the cases that were important to him and he would give the others to Christensen. And so Christensen - and these were things that that happened actually before I was over there, but recently enough that I knew about it. So Christensen eventually petitioned the court of appeals to create the calendar assignment system that they have now so that he would get a fair number of the cases and that sort of thing. And you know, again, you've got a copy of the biography and I tell some of the stories in there about how they had difficulties with the magistrate, with the clerks office, you know, that was another source of conflict. Ritter's the chief judge, so Ritter appoints the personnel for Christensen's court and things like that. They just - they're two outstanding people, but they were quite different people and for that reason it was difficult for them to get along.

Ken Verdoia:

One way that they differ, and you explained this to me, is their ideas of rules and procedure for the conduct of cases in their courts. Now we know that Sherman Christensen wanted actual printed clear guidelines and rules to be distributed to the attorneys. Tell me how the two men differed on that.

Parker Nielson:

Well, as you've just said, Christensen wanted to have rules of court, and he would try to set up appointments and, of course, with two judges, the both of them have got to agree on it. So he would try to make appointments and schedule meetings with Ritter to try to adopt rules of court and Ritter didn't want any of that. As I told you the other day, I've heard him say from the bench many times "in this court there's only one rule and that is there ain't no rules." And so you know, that was another source of conflict between them. So, finally Christensen just promulgated his own rules. He issued his own rules. So in Christensen's court, you have his rules of court that you have to follow those in Christensen's court. In Ritter's court there's no rules at all other than the rules of civil procedure, of course.

Ken Verdoia:

As you know, when you follow this storyline, you find lots of interesting details, but one thing I want to take you back to. Our story is really about the courthouse and how that's evolved over time and changed over time and you've seen those changes. What was it like, take me back to the late 1950s, early 1960s. What was it like to go into the building? What would we see? What would we hear? What would we experience?

Parker Nielson:

Well, of course the post office was on the ground floor, so you'd go in the front entrance there, the two rooms and you'd have the post office, and there was nothing to do with the courts at all on the on the main floor. Then you'd go up on the second floor and you'd have the clerk's office there and the US Attorney's office was on the west side of the building, and of course that's where I had my office, in the US Attorney's

office. Down on the south west corner of the building, the whole southwest wing of the building was Ritter's court. That was the traditional court going back to the time of Tillman Johnson, when he was the judge. And over on the north side of the building was where Christensen had his court and of course that part of the building had been remodeled. Well it was remodeled again while I was there, but initially, it was not very comfortable for Christensen. You know, his clerk was across the hall and that sort of thing and one of the things I remember about when I was over there is that - it became known around the building that Christensen had written a letter to Judge Ritter complaining about his quarters and about how, you know, 'you've got your good quarters down there and everything, and I'm down on this end of the building where it isn't quite as comfortable and so I'm going to have new quarters built for myself that are appropriate and as good as yours.' It was effectively like that. And Ritter wrote him a letter back and I've actually seen this letter and I think I might refer to it in my biography in which he said essentially, 'you're a United States District Judge. A United States district judge should have the kind of quarters that are appropriate to him. You go ahead and have the remodeling done and remodel your quarters the way you want to.' And you know, it was really kind of surprising to us over there that he had done this because, as you say, there was the kind of friction between them and here he was behaving as graciously as you could expect him to behave towards his fellow judge and telling him to go ahead and do what was appropriate.

Ken Verdoia:

You talk about it was more than judges and it was even more than the lawyers that appear before the judges. You talk about clerks; we've had others talk about US marshals, the magistrates. The public doesn't understand that there really is a lot of activity that goes on in a federal court; can you help us understand that?

Parker Nielson:

Well, you know there would just be - I don't really know how to respond to that. There was just an awful lot of work that goes on there that - so much work that one judge, or even several judges like they have over there now, would not be able to handle it on their own. You know, criminal matters, discovery matters, that sort of thing, and so you have judicial officers of various sort, the magistrate, and I guess over there now they have several magistrates. They are officers who are empowered to handle matters that are referred to them by the judges, and they also handle the matter of arraignment of criminals when they're initially arrested, you know, and there have to be charges filed against them and they have them arraigned very promptly. They take care of matters like that, and they'll actually even sometimes decide complex cases that are assigned to them by the judges. Of course ultimately the judge has to eventually make the decision. But like when Ron Boyce, who is now deceased, was magistrate over there, he was really a very capable person and the judges would sometimes assign complex cases to him for decision, and he would write an opinion and then of course they would have to have to go up before the judge himself, and he would either approve or disapprove of the opinion that had had been written by the magistrate. So there's all that kind of work that has to go on. And so you need those and the judges - you can go even beyond that. You know if you have a complex case like an antitrust case or something like that, the judge who's assigned the case can appoint an officer of his own. He might appoint what's called a special master, which would just be a lawyer who he has confidence in, who would be empowered to hear that case and write what we call a master's report, which would go to the judge and the judge would either approve or disapprove of that report. And that goes on in the United States Supreme Court too, you know, there are cases before the United States Supreme Court like if you have a dispute between two states. A good example would be the adjudication of the Colorado River, which was known as - the title of the case was Arizona versus California. Well, you know that's between two states and so you have original jurisdiction and in the United States Supreme Court, well the United States Supreme Court is not going to examine the witnesses and take the evidence and, you know, that might take six months of judicial time to decide a case like that, so they appoint what's known as a special master. And the special master writes a report, which is approved by the court. And if we're telling war stories since we're on Arizona versus California, I had a case and this gets down to a story about how Judge Ritter handled the cases in his calendar. I had a case when I was an Assistant United States Attorney involving the ownership of the waters in a tributary stream to the Green River up in Daggett County, Utah, and the case had to do with the water for a campground up there on the shores of the Flaming Gorge Reservoir. Well, my position as representing the United States in that case was that the waters that went to that campground, which were claimed by a rancher up there who

had an appropriation going back to about 1930, that the waters under what is known as the reservation doctrine in water law, nevertheless belonged to the United States and the United States could use them any time they needed them. Well, when I argued that case to Judge Ritter, I happened to have the master's report in the Arizona versus California case, and I cited that to Judge Ritter. You know, I state, this is my position, you know, the reservation doctrine, the United States got a right to use the waters and the special master has so concluded in Arizona versus California. Well, the case hadn't been decided yet, but I had the master's report, and because it was the master's report in the United States Supreme Court, that was good enough for Judge Ritter and he ruled in my favor. And so I established that that doctrine and that that case involving the campground up on the Flaming Gorge Reservoir actually before Arizona versus California and I remember the word came back to us there in the US attorney's office after that case that Judge Ritter, after I gotten through arguing that case and he decided it, came off the bench and he told Catherine Jensen, his secretary, "you know, Parker Nielson is doing an awfully good job in that case."

Ken Verdoia:

It's a nice way to be known. Let me ask you, what did the public misunderstand about Judge Ritter? Or was the public right because the public thinks that he was arbitrary, that he was capricious, that he was foul-tempered and that his decisions were not sustained - is that an accurate depiction or is the public wrong?

Parker Nielson:

Well, actually in a way there was some of that, in actuality, but what they didn't understand about Judge Ritter is how brilliant he was. And the features that you've just recited that the public saw in him? They were a reaction to people who were not quick enough to stay up with him. And you know, we've talked a little bit before about he would set up those calendars and, you know, the lawyers had to state their case and be prepared to respond to him very quickly. Actually, I think any lawyer who practiced before Judge Ritter in those days would agree that it was actually the most entertaining thing that you could possibly imagine, those rule days before Judge Ritter. You know, some of the humorous comments that he would come up with and the quickness with which he got onto an issue and decided it and he decided them correctly, you know. It wasn't a matter of just being arbitrary. He would decide those cases from the bench quickly and he would decide them correctly. You know, it's not that he didn't make mistakes, he did occasionally make a mistake and when Judge Ritter made a mistake, it was pretty dramatic, I'll tell you that, but even then if you know how to deal with Judge Ritter, you could cope with it. You know, Judge Ritter made a mistake, you could set up an appointment with him, you might go down to Catherine Jensen, his secretary, and set up an appointment with Judge Ritter and talk to him in chambers. You would do this, of course, in the presence of opposing counsel, you wouldn't do it ex parte. But you might go in and sit down with Judge Ritter and explain to him how maybe he didn't quite understand the issue or something like that and he'd made a mistake and he'd correct it. He'd say, well, let's go back down on the bench and we'll correct it, you know. He was just very expeditious in the way he handled the court, and how he dealt with the complex issues that would come before him.

Ken Verdoia:

Do you have a favorite Willis Ritter story that you'd like to share?

Parker Nielson:

Well, I don't know, there's so many of them -

Ken Verdoia:

Just one that might come to mind that shows a little bit about the man.

Parker Nielson:

Well, there's just an awful lot of them. I'd have to think about that.

Ken Verdoia:

His final years on the bench are somewhat embattled. He has almost a war going on with reporters that seem to be going after him and making headlines about how he's being reversed by the tenth circuit. Help us better understand the last five or six years of Judge Ritter on the bench, were they difficult years for him?

Parker Nielson:

Well, I don't know that they were any more difficult than any other. You know you want me to tell a Ritter story. I think one of the best Ritter stories and this was shortly before the time when I was an Assistant United States Attorney, but I knew about the story because it went on during my period of time. He was handling a case down there in his courtroom and in those days the building wasn't air-conditioned. And so you had ventilators that came up the wall behind the bench where he was seated and they were working on the building, and so the noise would come up through that that ventilator and interrupt his proceedings. And so he said to the marshal, go arrest the man. So the marshal goes downstairs in the building, finds out who's making the noise, arrests him, brings him up there, and in the meantime, Ritter goes on with court. In the meantime, more workmen are making noise and "marshal, go arrest that man" and so pretty soon, he's got all the workmen lined up on the front bench in front of him, you know. And his attitude was that you know, if I have to arrest the whole General Services Administration, that's what I'll do. But we're going to have proper procedure in my court.

Ken Verdoia:

That is a good one, good story. That pretty much takes me through everything I wanted to talk about in big principles. I'd like to go back and say, how did his youth, which I understand started in Park City, growing up hard rock mining, how did that shape who Willis Ritter was, do you think? How did it help shape him?

Parker Nielson:

Well, I think, you know, it just - he had a real feeling and appreciation of common people. You know, he was a common man himself and he had an appreciation because of his background for the hardships of common people. And that background was, I think, an important facet of Willis Ritter's. You know, again, you want to tell stories about Judge Ritter. I'll tell you another one and that has to do with what we call the riverbed case, which I told you about couple of days ago. That involved the ownership of the Colorado and Green and the San Juan Rivers, and the issue of course was the Aneth oil field. But that was the case that I told you about that I had to argue and prompt before the United States Supreme Court and in which Judge Phillips said "Well, Mr. Nielson, well, here you are right now" but even though I wasn't an assistant of the United States Attorney at the time, I was present in court at the time that case was tried because I'd assembled all the evidence and briefed the law and we had a colorful figure that you may be aware of by the name of Albert Lyman, who was the historian of San Juan County on the witness stand and Albert Lyman was really a very unique person, you know. At that time he was about ninety years old. He went through the Hole in the Rock with the Hole in the Rock party as a babe in arms and he spent his lifetime as a cowboy down there in San Juan County and he became the historian of San Juan County and he was the authority of San Juan County. And of course he was one of the witnesses that I had developed and we had him on the witness stand testifying about the early days in San Juan County. And Judge Ritter was very obviously impressed by him. There came a point in the trial where he turned to Albert Lyman, he said "well, Mr. Lyman where did you get your education?" and Albert replied, "Cow camp." And you know, that's the kind of a person that Judge Ritter would relate to and he was just fascinated by Albert Lyman. This old cowboy that had become the historian of San Juan County whose education was in the cow camp.

Ken Verdoia:

Good story. You've told us about how when judges are on the bench, it's not about their partisan politics generally, but you've also told me stories how politics can have a powerful influence on how the courts and the justice is made up when a presidential election takes place, for example, and there's a wholesale change that can take place, for example, in the US Attorney's office. You've witnessed that, so help me understand how politics does make its presence felt in the court system.

Parker Nielson:

Well, you know, politics shouldn't enter into the judicial process and in general I don't think it does.

Ken Verdoia:

Not on a day-to-day basis.

Parker Nielson:

Of course the judges are appointed by the president with the consent of the Senate, as you know, but I think what you're referring to is what I told you the other day about how I became an Assistant United States Attorney and handled that riverbed case that involved the ownership of the Aneth oil field and was forced to argue that case impromptu before the United States Supreme Court because Kennedy had been elected and Bill Thurman wanted to clean out all those Republicans that were in the US attorney's – well, it wasn't just Bill Thurman, it would have been Bobby Kennedy. You know, you want to put your own people in there and since I'd been working on the case, they appointed me an Assistant United States Attorney specifically to handle that case, which up until that time, the word around the courthouse was that no one else was able to take over that case. Well, I was able to because I'd done all the spade work in a private capacity working for – see, I was working for the oil companies which were lessees with the United States and so that's how I became acquainted with the case and qualified to take it over the way that I did.

Ken Verdoia:

One thing that you and Judge Ritter were both involved in profoundly important legal issues on the rights for Native Americans. What did you see in Judge Ritter? Was it that sense for the little guy, the down trodden, the person left out of the blessings of a system, when he looked at Native American issues that drew him to understanding and appreciating their rights?

Parker Nielson:

Well, I don't know, he did have a strong feeling for Native Americans. I don't know exactly what you want me to respond to and with that regard.

Ken Verdoia:

Where did it come from?

Parker Nielson:

I'll tell you, there was a case that I told you about the other day involving the Ute Indians that I handled that went to the United States Supreme Court. Now that case was - when I filed that case it was initially assigned to Judge Ritter and actually we did the discovery at the time when it was pending before Judge Ritter and became an issue about gaining access to the BIA records out there at Fort Duchesne. Well, Judge Ritter just ordered that all those records just be brought in here and filed in the clerk's office, so we were able to get copies of all of them. And later on, I remember this, I don't recall exactly how it happened, but we were in chambers and Judge Ritter said, "well, you know I don't think it's a good idea for me to handle that case because, you know, I just have a bad reputation as far as Indians are concerned." So he transferred that case to Christensen. So we did the discovery down in Ritter's court, the trial was done in Christensen's court and we had all the records, all the documents and that sort of thing and Christensen did just a superb job on it, because here we're confronted with the situation where we're representing all of these Indians, hundreds of them. And so Christensen invoked what he called the Bellwether procedure and what the bellwether procedure refers to is the idea that when you got a herd of sheep out on the range and you want to keep track of where the sheep are in a storm, you pick out the lead sheep and you put a bell on it. So in the storm you can hear the bell and know where your herd of sheep is. Well, he called it the bellwether procedure. We're going to pick plaintiffs, you pick six Indian defendants and we'll try those six cases, and those six cases will control all these hundreds of other cases that we've got involved here. Well, that went up to the United States Supreme Court on that bellwether procedure and it was affirmed and became the law based upon that procedure. And you know, it's a situation where I had the best of all worlds, I did my discovery done in Ritter's court where I got all the records available to me and I did the trial over in Christensen's court where I had the advantage of this bellwether procedure so that I could adjudicate the cases of all of those hundreds of Indians.

Ken Verdoia:

These two men. Okay, Parker Nielson, as we near the end of the interview, the one thing that you helped me understand and I thoroughly enjoyed is how much the court has changed over the past fifty years. When you were a young attorney it was a paper court, it was a typewriter court, it was a paper brief court and now it's very much the electronic world.

Parker Nielson:

Yeah.

Ken Verdoia:

Can you help the public understand that change as you've seen it play out over your career?

Parker Nielson:

Well, I don't know what you're looking for there. It's certainly true, you know, the courts like so much of life have become so computerized now that it's true that even in those days - you know, even though those two judges had that kind of friction between them and difficulties between them that there were a lot of reasons for that. Nevertheless, the clerk's office over there was always a model of efficiency and if you needed any records out of that court, you could be confident that they were available, they were accessible and the personnel in that clerk's office were just as helpful as they could possibly be and that was because of both of those judges, you know both of them would require that sort of a thing and they did. And it was just a model of efficiency.

Ken Verdoia:

Well, I love the story that you told me that when you were admitted to practice before the federal bar it was very much a one on one opportunity for you and then you-

Parker Nielson:

Yeah, well, of course in those days when Ritter was the sole judge over there, you didn't - attorneys were not admitted to the court en masse like they are now. If you had business before the federal district court, United States District Court, you had to be individually admitted to the court and you know, I told you this story a few days ago about my friend Alf Van Wagoner, who was a law school friend of mine who was practicing law up in Davis County and I was an assistant United States attorney. He came in to see me one day and he said "you know I got to file a petition in bankruptcy" he had to be a member of the court in bankruptcy court to a division of the court, of course. So you've got to be a member of the court to file a petition in bankruptcy and I'm not a member of the court. Well, will you move my admission and of course so I go down to Catherine Jensen, his secretary, and I say, "well, when Judge Ritter takes the bench, I'd like to move an admission." So Alf Van Wagoner and I are sitting on the front row of the court and Judge Ritter comes in, takes the bench. And it happens that he's right in the middle of a big complex antitrust case involving Joe Alioto from San Francisco and so he convenes the court and Joe Aliota calls his witness and puts him in the witness box and I'm sitting there thinking 'well, you know, he's forgotten. Catherine didn't tell him or something like that.' But no, Judge Ritter interrupts and he says "just a minute Mr. Aliota. Mr. Nielson do you have a matter?" I stand up and move the admission of Alf Van Wagoner and he says "yes, you're admitted, and Mr. Nielson, that was a fine statement that you made on behalf of your friend there and you go on down to the clerk's office and sign the roll of the attorney's." So that was the way it was in those days. But now of course, when a new batch of lawyers are admitted to the bar, they march them over there en masse and, you know, one motion and everybody's is admitted en masse. You're told me that your wife's an attorney, she probably went through that.

Ken Verdoia:

She certainly did, certainly did and it was one of those things where it even takes place whether you're there or not. They push all the names through. But there was something unique about seeing a judge saying "now who is this man?" and "who's standing up to talk for him" and "okay, based on your word, I'll admit him to the federal practice of law, now go down and sign the register". I mean, very, very different experience, very interesting experience, and the register would have to be signed and then you could file your petition.

Parker Nielson:

So, so, what is the question?

Ken Verdoia:

There wasn't a question.

Parker Nielson:

Okay. (Laugh)

Ken Verdoia:

No, there was not a question. One final question, it may seem like we're talking about Willis Ritter in negative terms and I don't mean to do that because I think his record speaks for himself and we will do that in our program, but a lot of people in my profession remember one thing about Willis Ritter and that is that he did not like my profession. Why?

Parker Nielson:

I don't think that's true. It was a matter of how you approached things. There were a lot of news people who got along very well with him, but I don't know, there were occasions where he had difficulties with news people, ordered them off the premises and that sort of thing. I don't know what the problems would be, but I think that he really respected the press and it was just a matter of how you approached him.

Ken Verdoia:

January 1977, it's these last few days and the legal proceedings involving Gary Gilmore and they had made a last minute argument in his court, which would eventually be the final consideration by the US Supreme Court. So, I'm a young reporter and I show up and I have a rather large and bulky reel-to-reel tape recorder on me and as a practical joke I asked the reporters that were outside the courtroom, I said "Can I take this in?" because I'd never been in the federal courts before and they said "oh, sure go ahead take it, the judge won't mind". So I walked in with a microphone and a reel-to-reel tape recorder over my shoulder, Judge Ritter came in and said "get him out of here".

Parker Nielson:

Okay, the problem, you know, I think I see the problem now. The problem was that Judge Ritter was concerned about the dignity of his court and he was concerned about press people coming around and sticking a camera in the face of the witnesses or the litigants or the jurors or whoever it is. He didn't want that to happen. He wanted to preserve the dignity of his court and he didn't want people to feel intimidated in coming to court or testifying in court or presenting their litigation in court. That was what he was concerned about, and I think that was the source of the kind of difficulties that you're talking about, and I might say that he wasn't alone in that regard. An awful lot of judges feel that same way. I think in his own way, Christensen would have felt the same way and, you know, you have a situation where even now, I suppose, they don't allow cameras in the United States Supreme Court, do they? No, you want people to feel comfortable about coming to court and presenting their matters in court and having a fair decision on their matters without being intimidated by reporters or cameramen or that sort of thing, and you know I think that's the source of the problem that you're talking about.

Ken Verdoia:

I think you addressed that very well. Last question, the life of chief judge Willis W. Ritter, Patricia Cally, Parker Nielson. I love this title 'Thunder over Zion'-what does that mean to you?

Parker Nielson:

Well, it gets back to the reputation of Judge Ritter that you are talking about. You know, just his public image. You were talking about it a few minutes ago about how people feel that it was arbitrary or, you know, difficult to deal with. That's what I'm trying to get at there. That he was a dominant figure, and his presence over the state of Utah and that sort of thing was - it was just awesome in a lot of ways.

Ken Verdoia:

Really the last of a breed though, right? I mean, we will not have one like that again; the court system has changed so dramatically. One judge, one set of rules, one set of authority, one very strong conviction

Parker Nielson:

Yeah, that's right, and I guess there's an awful lot of people who would say that's a good thing too. But I felt like he had it. He had his place, he was a champion of the little people, the disenfranchised, the people who were the outs in society. He was a spokesman for them and they got their day when they came to his court. He dealt with them fairly and he did it in a dramatic way.

Ken Verdoia:  
That's it. Thank You.