Clyde Fickes: No, I don’t. You can take that and have copies run off if you want to. Just return the original to me.

Jane Benson: I appreciate that very much. If you trust me with it—

CF: That’s why I got it out because it simplifies the thing as far as you and I are concerned. All the details are in there: names and dates and so forth. After you have read that, then if you have questions, we could get together.

JB: I’d like to do that. I don’t have a chance to read it all right now, but...

CF: No.

JB: Could we sit and talk about some of it anyway? Because there were some questions that came up when I was reading your *Recollections* [Clyde P. Fickes (1973)].

CF: Yes, I’ll answer any questions or try to.

JB: One of the things that I wanted to be more clear about in my own mind was when...Did the Forest Service use packs of mules before the depot got started? How far back does that go?

CF: Yes. We’ve been packing since the Forest Service was started in 1905. We’ve always had pack horses and pack mules, but the depot was to supply a reserve stock in case of fire season. As you read there, the 1929 fire season was very severe and that was when all this thing started.

We found out that we couldn’t depend on hired stock because the automobile had put most of the pack trains out of business. When you went to hire saddle horses and pack stock, there just wasn’t any available. Everyone assumed before that that it was just like it was back in the ‘20s, when any rancher would have a couple saddle horses. That isn’t true anymore. It may be more true now than it was in 1929 when we had this fire season because that was before all this horse seed (?) business came into the picture.

JB: These strings, they were not owned by the Forest Service. Had they been contracted out?

CF: What they did those days...if a man had four or five pack horses, he hired them out maybe for 50 cents a day or something like that and packed them or hired men to pack them for him.
The Forest Service paid the hired man’s wages and subsisted him too. With the advent and the
development of the automobile and the building of roads and all that sort of thing, they just
gradually eased the packhorses out of the picture. When you needed an extra supply, they just
weren’t available.

JB: I see. One of the things I was wondering about was...I’ve been trying to understand the
relationship between the ranch up at Perma and the depot at Nine Mile. How did this come
about?

CF: We had all these horses and mules, and you only use them for about three months of the
year. The rest of the time, you have to subsist them someplace. You can’t feed them hay all the
time. It costs too much money. You feed them grass. This ranch area on the river down there
was involved by two men in Idaho someplace and a man named Jack Beret (?), who lived here
and dealt in livestock and ranches had control of it. He and I visited back and forth quite a bit. In
fact, my wife and his wife played bridge together every week—that sort of a connection.
(laughs)

Unidentified Female Speaker: Not me, not me. (laughs)

CF: She’s the second installment. (laughs) Excuse me, dear.

He knew that we had to have a place to winter the stock. Prior to that time, for instance, the
Flathead Forest had about 50 to 60 head of horses and mules to winter. They contracted with a
man by the name of Bruns in the Big Draw, if you know what the Big Draw is.

JB: No, where is that?

CF: Beyond Big Arm. You know where Big Arm is on the lake?

JB: Yes.

CF: You go over to the next small town, and then you turn left and that’s the Big Draw. They
arranged with this rancher to winter their livestock there. Then there was a man by the name
of...my friend that died last year.

JB: Boyd Thompson?

CF: Yes. Boyd Thompson had a ranch in the Niarada area. He used to winter Forest Service
stock. He also occasionally, when it was fire season, he would pack for the Forest Service
someplace. He was a good cooperator, a good worker, and knew his business. When we got
started with the Remount Depot down here, we needed somebody to handle breeding stock.
We decided to raise some colts. I got Boyd to come down and handle that phase—tells all about
it in there. We proceeded then to raise some colts for saddle horses for use of forest officers,
which were at that time hard to get. People had quit raising horses. Nowadays, you can go out most anyplace and get three or four saddle horses without much trouble. In those days, there just weren’t any except stock that individual owners were working and didn’t want to dispose of. We started a breeding experiment down there to raise saddle horses.

JB: For the rangers?

CF: For the use of the Forest Service, whether the rangers or whatnot. That was one reason for that. Of course, after a few years, when we got to going good, then they developed a saddle horse among...private owners began to develop and come on the market so you could buy them. We carried on that experiment.

JB: At Perma then, is this where the horses and the mules are just wintered?

CF: We wintered all the stock in the region except from the Nez Perce, I think, down there at Perma.

JB: So it wasn’t just the stock from the Ninemile then?

CF: No. All the Forest stock in the northern part of the region.

JB: I didn’t understand that. How did you get them back and forth?

CF: They used to trail them. When we developed these big horse trucks that we could haul ten head in one truck, then we started hauling them. Much quicker.

JB: Would you tell me about the trucks? I find references to them, but I don’t know whose idea it was or how they got designed.

CF: That was my idea.

JB: Oh, was it?

CF: Yes.

JB: Who helped design the trucks? Or were there trucks like that available?

CF: Here’s the thing: in the 1929 fire season, that’s when everything started. We rented every kind of truck that you could think of to haul stock, men, and equipment too. Then we decided that, if we had to move stock fast, we should have our own equipment to do it with. We developed the horse trucks that could haul a string of mules and a saddle horse—nine mules and a saddle horse—and a packer to the fire. That became quite a deal too.
In fact, we’ve been quite active in the senior citizen center. A man there by the name of Harry Burnham has been telling me about...he drove one of the last and most modern horse trucks that we had. He’s been telling me how they handled ten head of mules and the driver and how fast they could drive with these big new trucks that they designed and developed after we started with the earlier one.

JB: Harry Burnham?

CF: Harry Burnham.

JB: Does he live here in town?

CF: Oh yes. He’s on vacation now and he won’t be home for another month, but he lives over here someplace. Up the Rattlesnake, isn’t it?

UFS: I don’t know where...

JB: I might like to talk to Mr. Burnham. Did he work for the Remount Depot?

CF: He drove for the region, out of Missoula and the Remount Depot.

JB: How did you actually get the trucks? Who did you go to and...?

CF: We just ordered them. They outfit in Seattle and build too (?); actually did the design to our specifications. We told them what we wanted and then they built them.

JB: That’s what I was wondering—if such a truck had ever been designed before.

CF: No. Nobody ever designed any kind of a horse truck until Remount. Before that, we would take an ordinary state (unintelligible) truck and put a couple more slats on it and make it a little higher and that’s all there was too it.

JB: Which company was it that made these trucks?

CF: It’s a big outfit in Seattle.

JB: Someplace I ran into the name Kenworth. Were these the Kenworths?

CF: Kenworth. That’s who built them. They did all the design, of course, to our specification. We told them what we wanted, and they designed it.

JB: How did you load them in?
CF: You just drop the tail gate and lead them in.

JB: Was there a certain way they had to be in the truck?

CF: They have to ride head first. First they started hauling them sideways. We kept getting broken legs.

JB: Why’s that?

CF: Truck would make a quick stop and dump the whole load in the front end and some mules would get hurt. I told them right from the first that you couldn’t do that, that you had to ride them the same way the truck was going. After we got so we did that, we had no more trouble.

JB: How far did these trucks carry stock, Mr. Fickes, during the fire seasons?

CF: From the Remount Depot, anyplace in the region, as far east as Miles City. It didn’t matter how far it was, we went!

JB: I think I ran into someplace once where it said they were trucked to California. Is that true?

CF: They might have. Might have trucked pack stock down there for exhibition purposes, but I don’t know of any particular cases. I left the region in 1945. A lot of things have happened since I left the region that I don’t know about, or I know about it in a general way but am not familiar with it.

JB: That’s why I’m talking to you. I want to know how it was when you were there. That’s what I’m interested in.

CF: Just as I tell you in that story there...we started from nothing. With some real experience in what it takes and what you have to do to get it done. We just went ahead from there and figured out what we needed to move them and we got it.

JB: Was there some difficulty in getting started? When I read your Recollections, I get the impression that you had to argue with a lot of people.

CF: Oh yes, I was in bad...even my own boss! I was in the office of operation under a man by the name of Stockdale. He turned out to be a rather peculiar person.

JB: Was it that they didn’t think the idea could work at all, or was it that they didn’t want to spend the money on it?

CF: They were jealous of me as an individual.
JB: Could be. Why was that?

CF: That’s what it was. (laughs) I’ll read you a little something here that’ll tell you.

JB: Is this something you’ve just written lately?

CF: No, I don’t know when I wrote this. 1970 I wrote this. (pauses) This is what happened. Stockdale was the chief of operation, and with him was a man by the name of Gardener I. Porter who was his executive assistant. I was in here on detail to design the lookout house— that’s another story.

JB: Yes, I remember reading about the lookout.

CF: Anyway, one morning in that ‘29 season, a fire developed just this side of Alberton, on the south side of the river. They were sending a crew out, and they needed an overhead, so they sent me as overhead. I was out there directing the fire and, prior to that, I’d been doing a lot of miscellaneous errands for the fire operation. Evan Kelley [Evan W. “Major” Kelley], whom you may have heard about, was the regional forester. Quite an outspoken person. This morning, they sent me down there on that fire and about 10:30 here came...don’t see his name right here—

JB: That’s all right. We’ll run across it.

CF: —to relieve me! He said, “I’m to take over from you and you’re to get back into the regional office as fast as you can. They need you in there.” He was in the fire office when they decided to...when Kelley came in and wanted something done.

They said, That’s something Fickes is handling.

“Where is he?”

“He’s down on this fire.”

“Get him back here. He’s the only one around here who knows where anything is.”

Of course, that offended all the old timers as were there. See what I mean?

JB: I see.

CF: That just upset the applecart as far as Stockdale and Porter were concerned. Their attitude towards me always after that was, Let’s get rid of him.
JB: If somebody else had suggested setting up a Remount Depot, do you think they still would have been skeptical?

CF: No, I don’t know about that, but nobody else ever even suggested such a thing.

JB: It was your baby?

CF: Yes, my baby, pure and simple, from beginning to end.

JB: Apparently, Evan Kelley supported the idea, didn’t he?

CF: Evan Kelley, we wouldn’t have done it except for him. He pushed the whole thing. He pushed it through me, and that’s what caused all this jealousy that, when they had a chance to get rid of me, they let me go.

JB: What sort of a man was Evan Kelley?

CF: Let’s see. I’ve got a picture of him someplace. He was a man about five foot seven and he was a very forceful character with a lot of experience. Born and bred and raised in California. Was a member of the Forestry Regiment during World War Two, and that’s where he got the title of major.

JB: I wondered where he got that.

CF: He came up here from California. In fact, in all phases of federal service, California is...the people from there are always tolerated. They’re not acceptable. They’re too damn pushy and too conceited and all that sort of thing.

JB: When they get to Montana, you mean.

CF: Yes, that’s right. That’s what I mean. But he was experienced. He was a good organizer. He knew how to get things done, and he appreciated anybody else who had the ability to get up and go and get things done. From then on, I had difficulties with my immediate superior, until they took me out of that office and put me in engineering, which happened very early. I wasn’t there very long. You can see how it come about. When he made this remark, “He’s the only one around here that knows how to do any of...that knows where anything is,” I persisted from then on practically on my own. The only way I ever got anywhere was, when Kelley heard they were doing something to me, he’d stop them.

JB: Was it someplace in your Recollections...you mentioned that you’d written memos about establishing this depot and somehow the memos kept getting lost. Is that true?
CF: I’m satisfied that Stockdale’s secretary, who went from here to Alaska and married an engineer up there, just deliberately destroyed them.

JB: Who was that? The secretary?

CF: Can’t think of her name…born and bred and raised right here.

JB: That’s all right.

CF: I can’t think of it right now. It’ll come to me after a bit.

JB: Apparently, you got along well with Evan Kelley then.

CF: Yes, we were more or less of the same persuasion as far as the practicalities of getting things done. He liked anybody who would push and stick their neck out to get something done. Even in the Forest Service, which has a…did have a reputation for many years of being a very outgoing, practical organization has gotten so that people kind of sit and wait for things to happen instead of trying to make them happen.

There were few technical foresters in those days. Most of the people who called themselves foresters were self-trained, self-read. I’ve got a book there that I just got. A man wrote a history of the United States Forest Service.

JB: Is that just a new one out?

CF: Just been published. I bought it from the University of Washington. It’s quite interesting because he tells things the way they were but…and he tells a lot of things that we people out here in the field never knew anything about. He tells the inner workings of the politics of getting appropriations and appointments and that sort of thing in the Washington area, which makes it a very interesting read.

JB: I’ve been reading a little bit of Gifford Pinchot’s book. I got started on that and…

CF: This book mentions a good many items from…excerpts from Pinchot’s book.

JB: I’m sure.

CF: I haven’t read that yet since I’ve been reading this. I thought I would get a hold of it and see what it looked like.

JB: Pinchot talks about this attitude of there’s nothing we can do about fire anyway, and so let’s just let it burn. Is that still the way it was in 1929?
CF: No. The idea then was just to put them out as fast as you can. 1910 taught them a lesson.

JB: That was the big one.

CF: From then on, the idea was get them while they’re little because, if they get to be big, you can’t handle them. I don’t know of anybody in the Forest Service that I ever knew that wasn’t very fire conscious and tried to do everything they could to suppress them and keep them from starting.

JB: Who was the first superintendent out there at the Remount Depot? Was that Hoyt? I ran into his name. No...Charley Butler. Butler, was he the one?

CF: Butler?

JB: Yes.

CF: He was the first one.

JB: How long was he there?

CF: Just a few months. That was another thing I tell about in here.

JB: I got him mixed up. Hoyt was a packer, is that right?

CF: Yes, he was just a packer. He was born and raised up around Big Arm.

JB: Is Mr. Hoyt still living?

CF: No, I don’t think so. I’ll tell you somebody you want to talk to about him. He’s one of the guys that was hostile towards me and that’s Cap Evans.

JB: Oh.

CF: You’ve heard of him, haven’t you?

JB: Yes I have. I have not talked to Mr. Evans.

CF: You might be well to talk to him. You’ll hear a different phase of my story. Now let me see here.

JB: I was wondering about Charley Butler...what sort of a superintendent he was.
CF: He wasn’t. It was unfortunate that we had to put up with him because he just couldn’t handle men.

JB: Oh.

CF: He just couldn’t. He didn’t know how to do...he was from the Miles City area. No experience in this western country with the kind of things that we were trying to do with the Remount. He was shoved off on me to be superintendent because the supervisor at Billings wanted to get rid of him. It’s one of those things.

JB: Whatever happened to him? To Charley Butler?

CF: He only stayed with us less than a year. Here it is (reads from Recollections), “Then a ranger from eastern Montana, Charley Butler, was assigned to be superintendent of the Remount. A nice guy, but without experience in handling crews of men and very little organizational experience, but we got along after a fashion. Several things happened out there: there were squabbles between truckers and so forth, and Charley just couldn’t handle it. So they moved him back east to where he belonged and gave me another guy by the name of Jake Williams.”

JB: I read a lot about Jake Williams.

CF: Jake Williams was a ranch boy raised down in the...on the Clearwater...down there on the Lapwai Indian Reservation. He was an experienced packing...he rode horses from the time he was big enough to sit up on them. He knew all about them. He was a good packer, and he was a good manager. The packers all respected him. If he told them anything, they did it. But he would stop at Frenchtown at the saloon and get pretty well loaded every opportunity he had. Eventually, they had to get rid of him on that account. They retired him. That was after they took the Remount away from me.

JB: Were you ever the superintendent of the Remount?

CF: I organized it and ran it, but I didn’t live out there. These men were all foreman under my supervision.

JB: Oh I see. Was Jake Williams trained as a forester?

CF: No, he was just a roughneck ranch boy that knew horses.

JB: When did they start getting trained foresters in there?

CF: I don’t know that they ever had any trained foresters in there. We never had any forestry graduates...we did from Montana in later years...who had ranch experience, and that’s what you needed to be a worker in the woods. Over in Idaho, you wanted to be a logger. Most of our
recruits in early days came from people who had worked on ranches or who worked with stock in various capacities and that sort of thing. They were able to take care of themselves in the woods. We’d get an experienced, trained forester who graduated from an eastern forest school, and he’d come out here. You take him up to the front end of the Lolo Trail and turn him loose and he’s lost.

JB: I suppose at the Remount Depot the ability to handle the animals and run a ranch was more important anyway, wasn’t it?

CF: That’s what it was. It was purely a ranch operation as far as the animals and packers were concerned. It had nothing to do whatever with forestry. It’s a service to the forestry. We had to have people who were trained in ranch operation to handle that kind of a job rather than somebody that knew all about how to grow trees and that sort of thing.

JB: Did the Forest Service ever have any other operations like this one...?

CF: No.

JB: ...anyplace else in the country?

CF: No. The only one they ever had.

JB: How did they feel about it in Washington?

CF: Roy Hedley, who was chief of operations at that time, approved it, just as I tell here...

JB: Did they see it as something sort of bothersome?

CF: No, they found out that in order to get back in the hills where there weren’t any roads and in order to subsist people that you had to have pack stock to get it there. They realized that that’s what you had to have and when they got them so they...to do the job, they went along with it, and planned for them. Oh yes. (reads from Recollections), “The memo was dug up, read, and discussed. The Major thought the plan might have some merit. Later on Roy Hedley, chief of operations form the Washington office read it and said, ‘Why don’t you do it? It makes sense to me.’”

Elers Koch—you’ve heard of him I suppose?

JB: I think so.

CF: Silviculture. He was born and raised in the Bitterroot and he was chief of the...what do they call it...silviculture.
JB: How do you spell his name?

CF: K-o-c-h.

JB: Oh yes.

CF: His son lives in Hamilton. (reads from Recollections), “Elers Koch’s silviculture was (unintelligible) on the fence and Fire Chief Howard Flint bitterly opposed. Plan finally receives approval by regional forester Kelley, and I was instructed to find a suitable place to set up the proposed Remount Depot.”

Then I go on to tell about how I found it and so forth.

JB: Now the architect for the buildings, when they started building the buildings, was that Bill Fox? The one here in Missoula?

CF: Bill Fox worked for me. Bill Fox and his partner John...what’s his name?

JB: Nowadays, it’s Fox, Balias, and Barrow. I don’t know what it was then.

CF: John Balias.

JB: Balias?

CF: Let me get this here...the first part of this tells about that.

JB: I can read whatever you have in there, but I was wondering if you had anything to add to that about what Fox did out there.

CF: The thing of it is I came in here specifically the spring of ‘29 to design a lookout house. I started on the Flathead on July 1, 1907. You read that? They finally transferred me to Sand Point with the idea that they needed some fire control instructors. Since I had in my record showed that I’d had considerable building experience they sent me over there to do it. That first year I drew some plans myself and the ranger on the Pondera and I went out the next winter and we built this lookout house. We had already cut it and packed it up there and then put it together, see. Next year at a conference in Spokane the matter came up. At that time, the region didn’t have any...

[End of Side A]
CF: ...to have a shelter for the lookout and have him up on top. Many of them had a lookout point where they’d go up and observe and then go down maybe a mile to where their camp was on the water.

JB: Yes.

CF: They decided they had to have a lookout on the job 24 hours a day. I built this lookout house and told about it at that conference. A couple months later, the regional office asked me to come in here and design the lookout house for the region, which was the reason I came in. I did that, and I tell about it in this thing: how we got the thing approved and Joel Hong (?), who was a draftsman in the Office of Engineering here with some building experience, helped me draw the plans. Then we went up to...what’s the county seat in Miller County?

JB: Superior?

CF: What?

JB: Superior? (long pause) Superior?

CF: Superior! We put this lookout house, which I had helped cut and put together the pieces, on the lookout southwest of...you can see the lookout from the road as you go west from Superior.

JB: You mean it’s still there?

CF: I think it’s still up there.

JB: Next time I drive up there I’ll have a look.

CF: Take a look. Joel and I went out there and we put the pieces all together. We knew it worked. The regional office said, Go ahead. The foresters were told that the plans were ready to order and so they ordered them. The next winter, they brought five or six rangers into the warehouse in Spokane and they ready-cut and put together 50 lookout houses. The next year, they were packed out and put up.

That was fine, but Major Kelley came along, and he didn’t like the idea of a lookout having to climb up and down the cupola. So he said, “Why not build a 14 by 14 house and put it on top of a post so the lookout’s on duty all the time?” So I did that. I prepared a plan, and that’s the lookout houses they build now.
The funny part of that...after I left the region they...the office in Washington and engineering
got busy and designed a lookout house. There’s one on Miller Peak that they built, and it cost
them 7,000 or 8,000 dollars. Ours only cost them about 100 dollars.

JB: I was going to say, I bet yours didn’t cost that much.

CF: I drove up there once to see it after I retired. We built hundreds of those ready-cut lookout
houses. This fellow over on the Coeur D’Alene had designed a cable brace tower and built a
couple of them on the Coeur D’Alene. We adopted that and drew plans for it. When they
ordered the lookout house, they’d tell how high of a tower they wanted to put it on. Then we’d
send out all the materials for the tower except the legs and so forth. That led to building the
rangers’ stations. I was raised in the building business—I think I already told you this—so I knew
something about that. We designed lookout houses. One of the nicest examples that we built is
up at...up on the head of Rock Creek...that town...mining town?

JB: Phillipsburg?

CF: Phillipsburg!

JB: Did you then get involved in helping to design the Remount Depot?

CF: What I was going to say is that we...they wanted to build a new rangers’ station at
Phillipsburg. Bill Fox and I went up there and surveyed the ground and we drew the plans. I, in a
general way, supervised the construction of that new station. They’ve built some more
buildings there since, but the original one on the east side of the highway is the one we built.
We did that in quite a few places.

JB: You and Bill Fox?

CF: Bill Fox, he was the chief architect.

JB: For the Forest Service?

CF: For the Forest Service. He worked for the Forest Service for ten or twelve years.

JB: I didn’t realize that.

CF: Until the war took him away. He was a reserve Navy man. Bill Fox and John Ballas...there’s a
picture of them in the Recollections if you read it. You remember that picture of...it’s a kind of a
cartoon?

JB: Yes, I think I remember it.
CF: That was my crew drawing these plans.

JB: I remember that.

CF: That was my baby too. We did a lot of that. Built rangers’ stations all over. The one I’m proudest of is down on the Custer [National] Forest at...there’s a picture of it in there too...we put the scoria...They have a material down there, and it’s a decomposed rock they call scoria?

JB: I’ve heard of it.

CF: We put the roof on the buildings at this station. It’s a scoria roof. I’ve got some pictures of it...there’s a picture of it I think in there, in Recollections. I was quite proud of that down there. It harmonized with all the other things around the area, although it’s an isolated spot. Nobody lives within a couple miles of the place.

JB: I think I remember seeing in the picture.

CF: We did things like that. We built the Remount Depot, of course, and we built some buildings out at the nursery and different places around.

JB: Does Mr. Fox still live in town?

CF: Yes. Fox, Balias, and...they’re architects on the south side. They’re doing the new airport building.

JB: Out at the Depot was it...how many head of stock was it designed to accommodate? When you had to plan the size of the barns and the buildings and the corral...

CF: We could handle most any number. We had up to 200 head at different times—

JB: During the season? Really?

CF: —during the fire season. Of course, we didn’t winter them there, but we had enough so we always had reserve stock. If we ran out of Owen’s stock, then we’d go out and hire and bring them in there and hold them there to be used. It started out to be a central depot to supply pack stock, and that’s what it did. Then we got helicopters and that put the mules completely out of business. There’s only a few around and I doubt there’s very many people who know how to put a decker saddle on a mule in the Forest Service.

JB: Now that many people like to pack back into wilderness areas, I think that it’s making somewhat of a comeback, don’t you?
CF: Could be. I’m not too familiar with it because I don’t fraternize with people who are doing very much of that stuff.

UFS: Ernie has two.

CF: What?

UFS: Ernie has two. My youngest boy.

CF: Yes.

JB: Is that right?

CF: Her youngest boy who lives out in—

UFS: Evaro.

CF: —Evaro Canyon. Has pack stock, and he packs all the time.

JB: I’d like to know more about how you set up the breeding program for these mules. Where did you get your breeding stock?

CF: Every string of pack stock...you always have a mare—

JB: Yes.

CF: —to lead the mules. The mules stay with the mare. If you’ve got the mare you’ve got the mules.

JB: This is the bell mare.

CF: Bell mare, yes. We brought them in. Then the major and I were talking out there one day—in fact we was riding—and I said, “We ought to utilize these mares and get some colts out of them.

He said, “Well go ahead and do it.”

So we just started breeding what mares came into the Remount Depot when the season came around, and we raised quite a few colts.

JB: Was that horse colts then or mules?

CF: Horse colts. We never tried to raise mules.
JB: Didn’t you later get into breeding your own mules though?

CF: We had a couple of jacks, but we didn’t breed our own stock.

JB: Oh.

CF: We just farmed them out like the RA Remount Depot used to do.

JB: Then I misunderstood that. Where did all the mules come from then if you didn’t breed them at the station?

CF: People raised mules everyplace.

JB: So you purchased them from farmers?

CF: We bought all the mules we ever used. We never raised a mule.

JB: So it was just raising the saddle horses?

CF: Yes. That’s all we bred out there was saddle horses.

JB: I’m glad to know that because I misunderstood that.

CF: No, the mules were something we were always able to buy. Down in Idaho in the panhandle, there’s quite a few places down there where they use lots of mules, and we’d go down there and buy mules. You can do pretty good in certain parts of eastern Montana, too, buying mules even today.

JB: Yes. I noticed the photograph on your wall. Nice looking mule.

CF: I’ll tell you the story. That’s Daisy. She was in a string and they were on the fire over on the Pondera Forest. About 200 men in the camp and the cook...they all had to have nosebags. So the cook made up great big stacks of sandwiches on the table. The kitchen, of course, was under a fly like it always was and, at the end of the fly, these tables and these sandwiches was all piled up there. Daisy was in camp. She was there packing. She got loose, and she ate damn near all those sandwiches. (laughs)

JB: (laughs) Was she kind of a special pet?

CF: The packers all liked her. She liked the packers. She was always nosing around in camps like a pet dog. That’s why I got her picture.
JB: I was out at the station about a month ago and Charlie Fudge—the ranger out there now—showed me around. I was talking with Don Harrington. Do you remember Don Harrington? Did you know him?

CF: The name sounds familiar, but I don’t remember...

JB: He went to work out there in about 1942. Anyway, he was saying that the mules were an extra-large strain of mules. I wonder how it is they managed to get such big ones if they didn’t raise them themselves out there. Do you know anything about that?

CF: I think he’s more or less mistaken about that. Mules average around 900 to 1,000 pounds. That’s the average mule. If you get them bigger than that, they’re too clumsy and too big to pack. Funny part of it is, most packers are little men (five foot seven or eight) and they don’t like a big mule because you got to put the packs up too high.

JB: So the ones you saw in the ‘30s then were not the big ones?

CF: We never tried to buy anything but...a mule is going to weigh 900 to 1,000 pounds and be 14 and a half to 15 and a half hands high.

JB: Same as a saddle horse.

CF: Yes.

JB: Can you tell me about the plow units? I can’t seem to find out much about the plow units.

CF: That there’s another idea...that’s discussed in Recollections too, I think.

JB: Some. There’s a little bit about it.

CF: They got the idea they wanted to build fire line faster than they could dig it with drug hoes so somebody suggested...There had been a few fire cases in the region over the years where somebody had used a horse and a two way plow to plow a fire line where they could work far enough ahead of the fire so that the horses or mule wouldn’t be burned...You couldn’t get them out. We organized the plow units and we had a plow horse...a special team of horses that pulled the plow. Then we sent a saddle horse along for the fire chief and the plow shaker (?), of course, was there. They used them in a few places, but you had to have a fire where it was burning slowly and not making much heat in order to work the horses up against it. There were places where it worked really good, but in heavy timber or in lodgepole, you just couldn’t do it because you couldn’t get through.

JB: I was wondering about that. In real rough country, you couldn’t...
CF: The only place you used it was in fairly open country where you were fighting mostly a grass or brush fire.

JB: Did you keep heavier animals to pull the plows?

CF: Yes. The plow unit horses had to weigh 1,600 pounds or better. The ones that we bought I think weighed 1,650 to 1,700.

JB: Were they Belgians or...one of those?

CF: Just happened to be Belgians, but any good draft breed would do the job.

JB: How long did they keep using the plow units?

CF: I don’t know. They were still using it when I left the region.

JB: And when was that?

CF: During the war.

JB: Oh.

CF: When I transferred.

JB: I got the impression from reading that maybe it hadn’t lasted long.

CF: Didn’t use them too long because it turned out it wasn’t too practical a thing to do. They stood around. You fed them and took care of them and you had them, and you didn’t get more than two or three days of work out of them in the year, so it wasn’t very practical.

JB: What sort of...

CF: Then they came along with this trencher that one of our rangers invented. There’s some pictures of that around too. Gasoline engine propelled plow. That had quite the go-around for a while.

JB: So that replaced the plow units?

CF: Plow units, yes.

JB: Forgot what I was going to ask you. I’d like to talk some more about the breeding programs. Now, you mentioned the Morgan stallions that were brought to the Depot. Later wasn’t there a change of heart? Didn’t they go to a different kind of horse?
CF: That’s the difference between somebody that knows something about horses and somebody that reads a book and has a theory.

JB: I’d like to know about that.

CF: One reason why I was partial to Morgans...I partly grew up on my grandfather’s farm in Pennsylvania. He raised Morgans. I knew them. If you read the Morgan horse book, it tells all about it. They weren’t all that sort of thing. They were the type of animal that was steady and easy-going and strong and capable. Just fitted the picture better than...Thoroughbreds are too high-strung for the kind of work you want to do, like lead the pack strings and things like that. That’s why we bred Morgan horses—because of my own prejudice in their favor.

JB: They’re a little small, aren’t they?

CF: Yes, when they took the Remount Depot away from me and turned it over to Bradeen and his assistant...his assistant for some reason or another—because he was born in Miles City—thought that he knew more about horses than I did. He went back east and he paid 2,700 dollars for a stallion, and they never got a colt out of him.

JB: What kind of a horse was that? Was that one of the Saddlebred horses?

CF: Saddlebred, yes.

JB: I think I ran into the Saddlebreds.

CF: He wasn’t exactly Saddlebred. He was more...came out of Kentucky. He must have been more thoroughbred than anything else.

JB: But they didn’t get any horses?

CF: No, they didn’t get any colts out of him. When the horse showed up here, the regular packers all just threw up their hands. “What do we want that long-legged thing for?” There you are. They paid 2,700 dollars for him and sent a man back there to get him.

JB: Did you buy a lot of horses from over at Miles City?

CF: Yes, I bought a couple carloads down there several times. They had them there and they were the kind of horses...in fact, they gave us a horse they called Admiration.

JB: I remember reading about that in your Recollections.

CF: There’s a picture of me sitting on top of him?
JB: Yes.

CF: In a parade with my hand up like this?

JB: Yes. He’s the horse that they had to destroy because he ran into a train? Is that right?

CF: Yes. I told about it there, but pure carelessness. The supervisor, God rest his soul, of the Kootenai at that time was another fellow who was town-raised but had the idea that he knew all about horses and that sort of thing. As a matter of fact, he didn’t. The fellow that hurt... did he die? No, he’s still around. Lives up the Bitterroot. They put on this horse, and then they had him race him right into the train up at, not Libby, but Troy or someplace up there. That’s just the outstanding example of what you get from people who just think they know horses.

JB: Yes, that was too bad. A couple of times in your Recollections, you mention the rocking chair horses. What did you mean by that?

CF: Rocking chair? That was my friend Boyd Thompson’s brand.

(pause)

JB: I’m checking off all the things I knew I wanted to ask you. Questions came up when I was reading things. You mentioned Bradeen. Who was he again?

CF: Orrin C. Bradeen was a native of Massachusetts. For some reason or another, when he was a young man, he came out to Miles City. I think he came in with the train as a clerk or a bookkeeper or something. He got a job on the old forest down there as a forest clerk. He was a pretty good guy in many ways except he didn’t know too much about horses. He and I got along pretty good in a good many ways, but, like everybody else, he had his opinions about things.

When I left the region and they had turned the Remount Depot over to the P & S, they called it—Purchase and Supply—he was the head man down there. He ran things the way he wanted them done, which wasn’t the way I would do it or somebody else might. I have to tell you this... We were on this rubber project which you may have read about...

JB: The rubber...?

CF: ...during the war?

JB: No, I don’t remember that.

CF: You don’t? They’ve got the plant in California and Mexico. They call it guayule. There’s a picture of it growing in my Recollections book. They make rubber out of it. Every tire that’s on...
the road today has a small percentage of guayule rubber in it and they used it because of its—what they called “tackiness. It has more adhesive capacity than India rubber, so they put it in tires.

In World War Two, didn’t have any rubber and Mr. Roosevelt had heard about this guayule rubber and he said, “Why don’t we raise our own rubber?” The Forest Service got the assignment to put the thing in. Bradeen and I and several others from here were sent down to Salinas California to start the rubber project. I was in charge of the improvements: building the buildings and getting the land and setting it up and all that sort of thing. We cut quite a wide swath of that job. We did something that...while the local people and the people who have all those big vegetable and fruit and orange groves in that country who treat their employees as the most miserable thing you ever saw were all against us, we still survived their political opposition and put the guayule project forward. In fact, it’s still operating at a site...

JB: No, I hadn’t read that part in...

CF: ...over in Arizona someplace.

JB: I’d be interested in reading more about that.

CF: We got away with some pretty fast things down there I was instrumental in.

JB: A couple times you’ve mentioned when they took the Depot away from you. What do you mean by that?

CF: They relieved me as supervisor to the Remount. That’s what I meant. They just told me to stay away from there. They didn’t even want me to go out there on a Sunday to visit with my friends.

JB: How did that come about, may I ask?

CF: Professional jealousy pure and simple. I got away with something that nobody else could do. Frankly, it was a little bit like Major Kelley when he made that remark, “He’s the only one around here who knows where things are.” I had that ability. It’s part of me. People who don’t have it or only have it to a moderate degree are jealous.

JB: Did you make somebody angry over some particular thing out there?

CF: I wouldn’t be surprised.

JB: (laughs) When was that? Was that about 1935?

CF: About the time the war started.

Clyde P. Fickes Interview, OH 086-003, Archives and Special Collections, Mansfield Library, University of Montana-Missoula.
JB: Yes. You’ve been able to see a lot of change from before the Remount Depot was set up.

CF: I started when there wasn’t anything.

JB: Right.

CF: We built it up to what it is today.

JB: Then you saw them introduce helicopters instead of using mules. How do you feel about that? Do you think the Forest Service...?

CF: I’d like to ride one of those damn things.

JB: What, the helicopter?

CF: Yes.

JB: Do you think the Forest Service has lost anything by not using mules anymore?

CF: Sure, they’ve lost something, but they haven’t lost anything they can’t do without. That’s a matter of sentiment. It’s like, you prefer...what would be a good example? Anything you like and prefer other people think it’s just something. That’s what it amounts to.

JB: Has it been a definite improvement in fighting fires with this new technology?

CF: I think they get to them quicker and dropping this fire retardant...that’s all wonderful. In a general way, I got in on the start of that, when we first began to drop stuff from the airplanes, when the Johnsons were flying their planes for the Forest Service.

JB: Do you miss the days of the Remount Depot and the mule strings?

CF: It was a very pleasant experience. I wouldn’t give you a dime for anymore of it, but the three years that I spent on Sun River in 1907, ’08, and ’09 are priceless. You can’t do anything that gives you a better feeling than that did. Some of the things are the same way. If you like to do something, if you want to have something, you just kind of live with it.

JB: What did you like best about the Depot? About being out there and running that?

CF: I liked just the idea of being with men and horses. It’s a satisfactory thing. Like I said (?), my grandfather raised Morgans. As a kid—six, seven, eight years old—he would give me a colt, a three-year old colt, to ride to the post office, two miles. Sometimes a cousin from over the...
ridge would meet me at the post office and we’d ride back about a mile together. Kids on a
couple of colts—he rode colts too—we had to try them out a little bit.

JB: I think I understand. (laughs)

CF: I’d get home and the seat of my pants was a little damp, and there was a little moisture
showing on the bareback of the colt. I walked to the post office the next week. That’s the way I
learned those things.

When I came west, my uncle had a ranch. I was on that ranch. My cousin homesteaded over at
Cut Bank. I helped him work on his...I wasn’t old enough to homestead. I worked on his
homestead, and then I worked on the Blackfoot Reservation for the old Prairie Stock Company
in the summer round up. I got that kind of experience. One of the most pleasant memories I
have is the day that Charlie Russell spoke to me and said, “How are you kid?”

JB: Oh! Where did you meet Charlie Russell?

CF: That’s a long story. You’ve heard of the Conrads in Kalispell?

JB: Yes.

CF: They run Conrad National Bank?

JB: Yes.

CF: Old Charlie Conrad who founded that bank—he and his brother—had a friend...I’m trying to
think of his name...who was an old time cowboy whose name was Charlie Russell. He had a
taxidermist shop in Kalispell when I was a young fellow around there. My uncle and my cousin
had both killed big heads of deer and they had them mounted. I got to hang around this
taxidermist’s shop talking to this fellow. This fellow and Charlie Russell punched cows together
as young fellows, worked together and were very close. I would go in there, and Charlie Russell
would be there. I met him.

JB: In Kalispell?

CF: In Kalispell, in this taxidermist’s shop. I was smart enough, I would just go off in the corner
and sit down like I was looking at something and listen to those two reminisce. Then I boarded
at the Belista (?) restaurant, which was the oldest good restaurant there for years. I don’t think
it operates anymore. You’d be in there at breakfast in the morning, and Charlie Russell would
come in and sit down and have his breakfast at the same table you were sitting at. I never was a
friend of his or anything, but that’s the contact I had with somebody who became very famous.

JB: How old were you then?
CF: Let’s see. I was born in ‘84, and that was along in...1905 and ‘06.

JB: Oh. I didn’t know he spent that much time over near Kalispell.

CF: From 1900 to 1917, I was in...Kalispell was my home, but I wasn’t there all the time. I got to know a lot of people.

JB: How did Charlie Russell happen to come over to Kalispell?

CF: He had a ranch...or a cabin at Lake McDonald—spent his summers up there. He would come down every couple weeks to visit with his friend Harry Stanford in Kalispell, and that’s why he was there.

JB: Is there anything else that you’d like to tell me about those days at the Remount Station that hasn’t been written down.

CF: I don’t know. You take this, and maybe this will excite you.

JB: I’ll be glad to have a look at that.

CF: If you want to have it...not mimeographed but...

JB: Yes, I’ll get a Xerox copy.

CF: You want to make it a Xerox copy, it’s all right with—

[End of Interview]