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This is an interview with Jim Lindell by Kathy Root for the Smokejumpers Oral History Project on July 22, 1984 in Missoula, Montana. OH# 133-60.

KR Jim, if you could just tell me a little bit, just a short overview, what's your history with the Forest Service or the smokejumping?

JL When I was a freshman in college at the University of Minnesota, I'm from a small town in Minnesota, Litchfield, I spent a good share of the year writing forest rangers out in the western states looking for a summer job. I'd been kind of a, smokejumpers are not well known in Minnesota, but I was somewhat aware of them because my brother majored in forestry and spent some time in the west and I thought it'd be fun to try to get into that. I was told that you've gotta have some fire experience on the ground before you could even apply for the jumpers. So I canvassed some back country forest rangers and lookin' for a job and one in the ranger, the Bungalow Ranger District in Clearwater Forest in Idaho, offered me a job. I ended up spending the summer of '62 in a lookout tower in the Clearwater National Forest. I was one of the few tower people that managed to spend the whole summer on a tower, it was pretty remote. And I got the number one fire smokechaser job then on the district the next year, the second year, in '63, and I got a good recommendation and applied for the jumpers in McCall, Idaho. I was accepted for training there, was trained at McCall and then assigned to the jumper base at Idaho City. About eighteen guys on the list there and we trained at McCall and then moved down to Idaho City and opened up the Idaho City facility, uh, usually around the first of July or the first week in July or something around there. And so I jumped summer of '64, '65, and '66 in Idaho City. My career was shortened by Uncle Sam, I got drafted during the summer of '66 and the draft board agreed to just wait until the end of the fire season. I was in enrolled in Law School at the University of Minnesota at the time, and they said, "Sorry about that, Jack," and off I went. I was in the Army for three years and as much as I wanted to, I never had the opportunity to get back.

KR Okay. So, in 1962 you were aware that there were smokejumpers.

JL Yes.

KR And that you wanted to go after it and that's when you started your canvassing?

JL Yes.

KR Looking for the [inaudible].

JL Right, I wanted fire experience and I was offered a job actually in a couple of fancier places, West Yellowstone, for example. I didn't want to be, I wanted to be fighting fires to
pave my way into the jumpers, not handing out brochures to tourists, you know, and tellin' 'em to beware of the bears, stuff like that. So I took this and plus I needed the money, and I was afraid that if I took a job in a town I'd end up spending it and I wanted a job in a remote area where I could save the money and also get some fire experience. That's why I took the job. Bungalow Ranger District doesn't even exist now, I drove through there eight years ago and all it is is a flat spot where the Ranger Station used to be, it's really in the woods.

KR What is it that you heard from your brother about smokejumping that caught your attention?

JL I'm not sure I heard anything from him. I may have seen, you know, read an article in the paper about some fires in the West, you know, and smokejumpers were on 'em and came across 'em in a book somewhere, I'm not really sure, I can't recall how I became aware of smokejumpers, but I basically knew that there were guys that fought forest fires by jumping out of airplanes and I thought that sounded like a lot of fun.

KR You just wanted the fun or the challenge, what is it, I mean, here you are in Minnesota, I grew up in Minnesota.

JL Oh!

KR So I know you don't here that much about it, it's not that common a thing and it just grabbed you enough for you to travel and get those two years experience in fire fightin'. What is it that, that grabbed you, you know, I mean that's a, that's a goal you had in mind for two years.

JL Yeah, no, I did have it, I did have it in mind, it's, I didn't just fall into it, I did go, I did seek it.

KR Was it the jumping part of it?

JL It was all of it. I thought it was kind of romantic, you know, and a lot of little boy in me said, "Hey, that's really nifty." I don't know if you've talked to many of these guys, but there is a little boy in every one of 'em, it's fantasy-type stuff, a lot of it, and it's one reason that you hear jump stories that won't quit, you know, cuz everybody has 'em. The only things that are probably exaggerated is you tend to put yourself in a good story, you know, when you're telling it to somebody who doesn't know actually who was there. My ned year, '64, four of us jumped on a nudist camp between Boise and Idaho City and I'm sure everybody's been on that, everybody at Idaho City has jumped that fire, you know. But I got, I still am in contact enough with the guys that did jump it that I haven't told my wife that I was one of those that jumped on that one.[laughter]

KR That'd have to be an unusual story, I want to hear about that later.
That was reported in the Boise Press and T.V. and everything. Some guys were on a hill overlooking the nudist camp started the fire with a cigarette. Four of our guys jumped it, four were trucked into it cuz there was a road leading to a portion of it. And that was the old nudist camp fire.

Were they in danger, the people in the camp?

They weren't in danger, no. It was in the hills, it was in, it was on a mountain overlooking the camp and it was basically going up the mountain and the camp was below it. There actually were nudists that tried to help with the fire and you can imagine the stories that flowed from that incident.

And they didn't bother to put their clothes on before?

Some. The story I get was some.

Okay, '64, you got accepted to be a smokejumper and...

Accepted for training, not everybody that trained was, you know, got in, actually got in to jump.

How's that, what happened to those guys?

Well, there were guys, a few guys washed out, not a lot. A lot of the guys were known to the smokejumper crew chief, you know, the foreman at McCall, and the squad leaders. Many of them are well-known jocks from Idaho. How they picked a kid from Minnesota, I'm not sure, I really am not sure. But there were a few that knew nothing about [it] and a few of them washed out. As I recall, there were about twenty-two slots to be filled that summer and they, I believe about twenty-six guys were invited to camp at McCall, I think around 4 to 5 washed out.

Why do people wash out, what are some of the happenings?

They just, in my, my view is that they either have, and this is subjective because I wasn't privy to the discussions that led to, at the end of the three week or the two week training schedule before practice jumps started, there's about two weeks where there was just P.T. and crap and hard work and physical training and you used to wake up during the night, with a tension that was building in you getting ready for the next day, everything was race, race, race. We were all told, not all of you are going to be smokejumpers and you looked around and there was some pretty competent individuals there, a lot of jocks, you know, have a pretty, you talk in terms of just toughness and hand to eye coordination, they were pretty impressive, frankly. And everybody put out 100% at all times, I mean, there was no, I, subsequently have met a couple of guys who it was so easy for, I mean they were such great jocks that, you know, they were pretty much knowing that, you name it, if it's physical, they're gonna come out at or near the top. But everybody else was puttin' out all the time, you know, it was race, race, race from the time we
got up in the morning to the time we went to bed. Each day was terminated by an obstacle course and it just was a bitch. The first obstacle was a wall that, and we were all wearing heavy boots, you know, and stuff. I dreamt about that damn wall because if I got a little run at it and jumped as high as I could, I could get maybe two digits on each hand over the wall and you got to get over the wall, so from just gettin', and I couldn't get all, you know, all my fingers over it, I mean, I was, it was [inaudible] boy, I'm not kidding you, to get over that wall and then the other obstacles, it was just a question of time and we were always timed, you know, and some, a couple guys couldn't get over that wall, some guys couldn't. And we all were, kind of had this subjective feeling, if you can't get over that wall, you're gone, you know, and I mean it was close for me, I always did, but...

KR Just by two or four fingers, huh?

JL Right, it was close.

KR So, it sounds like it was a real stressful two weeks?

JL Oh absolutely, and I remember then at the end of the two weeks we were called in one by one to face the foreman and the trainers. We had two trainers when I was a ned, Ken Smith, who was a crew leader then down in Idaho City and Ken Sawyer, a guy nicknamed "Moose Sawyer", he died my ned year in a plane crash. Hell of a guy, both of 'em are. Ken was here at the reunion. And we were waiting out there, you know, waiting for our interview, to find out if we were in or not and we had gotten no clue up to that point as to how we were doing. And I remember when I faced Del Catlin who was the foreman there at McCall and "Moose" Sawyer and Ken Smith. And they, you know, I came, I walked in and I was nervous and humble and contrite and Smith made some smart ass remark to me, you know, that sounded as though, ya know, "we don't have anything to talk about," ya know, "just 'nice havin' ya,'" you know, that type of thing and just from his attitude I knew that I was in and I was delighted and it took about a minute, you know, and they said, "Nice job, and you know, next week is gonna be just as tough." But at least by that time I knew I was gonna get the practice jumps unless I did some major screw up, I was in, not everybody made it. It was either, I suspect there may have been a personality thing involved a little bit, I mean everybody kind of knows who do you like and who don't you like, although as a general rule, these jumpers are the finest people I have ever associated with and a reunion like this can't fail, you know, I jumped twenty and nineteen, eighteen years ago. I have been back to Idaho twice in that time, once about eight years ago when I was taking my family through to Portland, Oregon, in which I saw about oh, five or six of the old jumpers, they were at Boise at the time, one was farming apples, and one has visited me in Minnesota and when I see him it is like it was last year when I saw him, I mean, the ones that were my close buddies then are just as close today and the ones that were medium-close buddies are medium-close buddies today, it's
amazing. The duration, the durability of those relationships.

KR So there's a bonding that takes place?

JL No question about it, never experience, this is special to me and I suspect it's special to anybody that's done it and felt like they were a smokejumper cuz it's the kind of comraderie that, that living together. And see in Idaho City we lived in barracks, you know, and a few guys lived in trailer houses right there, it wasn't spread through town in apartments or any of that stuff. We were a unit, no doubt about it, so I suspect that, you know, the unit as a whole was probably closer at Idaho City, a small post, eighteen guys on the jump list, than McCall or Missoula or one of the larger posts, I suspect that, I don't know. But it was, ya know, all the posts, I'm sure, have got their group of, you know, where they're real close, but maybe the smallness of our unit meant we knew each other, everybody in the unit maybe a little bit better. And that element of some danger and excitement and super hard work, when you get a fire that's going, boy, it's the toughest work I've ever done. I mean, it can be just exhausting. And you can't help but experience that with somebody and not, you know it's kind of a special thing, wherever you happened to be, you know, we all remember fires and the comical things that happened and working your butt off and once in awhile somebody gets hurt, you know, you remember those things.

KR So there were three or four guys that didn't make it that were called in and...

JL Oh right, well, some guys just didn't have, you know, we did these coordination exercises and stuff as part of P.T. and they were kind of a step behind in the obstacle course and it just didn't have the physical facility to do some of the manipulations that we had to do or, you know, just the, like I say, a step slower, a little bit, cuz the competition was tough, there was no doubt about it.

KR So it wasn't a question of, did some of the guys leave before the end of those two weeks, or it was just, they had twenty-two slots and there were twenty-six men?

JL As I recall, about two guys left and maybe two guys were told, "Sorry", and they were given pretty good jobs then on the ground, spots were found somewhere in the district, in the region for 'em and they weren't bad guys or anything. There was some thought about safety, you know, and stuff and some concern for them, too, you know, it wasn't just, "You're not good enough".

KR So you got accepted after the two weeks of training and you go into third and fourth week and you make your first jump, do you remember it?

JL Very well.
KR What was that like?

JL I was scared, petrified and I remember Julio Bilboa who is perhaps my best friend from those days, he was a Basque kid from Cascade, Idaho, short, dark, good-looking kid, great jock, and he was the, just by alphabetical order, he came up first, in the Doug in the plane load. We were jumping out of the Doug our first jump. And I thought, thank God, I'm not the first guy that's gotta sit in that door, you know, or stand in the door. And poor Julio, I'll never forget it, that kid is some tough kid to, and I'll tell you another thing, if it wasn't just peer pressure, We could have jumped to our deaths and we would have known it and we would have all walked out of that airplane.

KR Because of the peer pressure or the peer support, which one?

JL Both. It was clearly both. By that time we knew each other very well, we know who our other neds are by that time and it was disappointing almost to leave some in McCall and some split and go, gone to Idaho City cuz we were very close by that time. So it was both, but I remember just kind of being in a haze, walkin' out, standing in that door, but exhilaration once you're out and you feel the canopy over you and being in the, hearing the plane drone off in the distance, it was just a quietness, I remember just yelling with exhilaration, just some goofy yell. And, but then the second one was okay, and the third was a little less tenseful, you know. But I remembered admiring Julio for being the first guy out and never flinchin', I'm sure he was feeling the same thing most of us were, but everybody stood in, everybody went, just like everybody always does, I suppose. I think the scariest jump was, was my, well two. My first fire jump, cause then it was different, wasn't practice conditions, wasn't a nice cool morning at 2000 feet, it was a hot, windy afternoon and the pilot was a new pilot for us that summer. He had a hard time, we were in a Twin Beech, the pilot was having a hard time slowing the plane down, he couldn't get it, you know, at the first pass we were doin' about a 105 knots or something like that and I was sittin' in the door and I couldn't get out, the wind had me plastered against the door so bad, I couldn't even get out. And the spotter was Smokey Stover, our foreman at Idaho City, grabbed me and held me back in cuz I had, you know, I was way past the spot and he, you know, kind of swore and yelled at the pilot, "Take her on again and slow this son of a bitch down", I heard him, I remember him saying, and I thought, "Oh God," you know, so here I'm sittin' in the door as we go around again, couldn't get out the first time and of course, it was in the mountains, it wasn't on a meadow or, you know, here in McCall. But once that was over and it got better. And the first jump of the second year was a scary one because you'd had, it was new enough to you that you didn't feel like an old hand and you had all winter to think about that first time out again and by that time, you know, obviously you were gonna go, I mean, you were a veteran, I mean, everybody thought, look we don't expect you to have no qualms about it and so the first time out the second year again was a scary one, it was just kind of like you had all this time to
think about it and reflect that what you're doing and all that. It's your mind doin', playing games with you. But then it got more fun as the experience went on. The tension went down a little bit and the fun went out, you know, so by the end, during your second year stuff, you're kind of playing with different ways to leave the plane and you know, just gettin' more accomplished and comfortable with it.

KR That first jump that was on a fire and you were, it was windy, you got plastered against the wall, was your landing okay, do you remember the fire?

JL Yes, I remember the fire, it was just, it was just a small spot, I remember, just two of us jumped it, Dick Graham, was my, was one of the crew leaders, he wasn't, right, Dick Graham, he was here at the reunion last night. And just the two of us jumped it and we were relieved then by a ground pounder after we had knocked it out. It was just a small fire, you know, it didn't take us long at all and we left him one of our food bags and he was eternally grateful. We always ate better than the ground pounders and we got chopped out and I really don't remember my landing, but it was, you know, it was uneventful.

KR What did your family think of you when, you know, '62, '63, '64, here you were going out West every summer and saying, "Hey, you know, I want to be a smokejumper, I want to jump out of the plane and go fight fire in the mountains." Were they supportive?

JL Well, I'm close to getting my pilot's license back in Minnesota, it'd be kind of the same thing they think now. Nobody ever tried to dissuade me from it, it would have been a waste of time, first of all. Uh, and my mom told me, you know, ten years later, it used to scare her to death when I would head West, but she never said that to me when I was doing it. She'd kind of, you know, shake her head and roll her eyes and, but that was about the extent of it. I think my dad was kind of pleased, he was an old Marine, you know, very gentle person, but everybody in the family knew what I was doing and I, so I know people were talking about me, you know, I think my dad was probably kind of proud that I was doing that. And I know my sisters and stuff, used to, they enjoyed tellin' their friends and stuff what I was doing.

KR So you had a lot of support?

JL Oh sure. It sure was fun. The West is like a second home for me, I love it out here, you know, I love Minnesota, too. But after a year at the University, loadin' up my car, I had an old Volkswagen and a '55 Chevy, loadin' that sucker up after my last final and saying, Sayonara Minneapolis, I'm heading West", it's like passing out of one world and heading for another, but it's just waiting for me out here, good friends and a lot of fun, it's just a great way to spend a summer.

KR Did you have a lot of fires in '64, that first year?
JL The first year was kind of a medium year. Now I jumped just three years and I'd like to say that I got just a ton of jumps, but I frankly don't. I think, as I recall, I've got seventeen fire jumps and seventeen practice jumps. I think I got about, and it worked out about like six, three, and nine or maybe I have eighteen fire jumps. The second year was really the pits, it was cool and wet and I remember that, that, you know, we just felt like God was against us that second year, we just didn't get diddly. We got a few extra practice jumps because, you know, we weren't getting any fire activity and then the third year was a much better year and I would have had uh, and everybody got a lot of jumps, but I had to take about two weeks off right in the heart of the season to go back to Minnesota to talk to my draft board and so I missed several jumps then. Otherwise, that was a good year.

KR So '65, you said it was a cool, wet year, what did you do, a lot of project work?

JL A lot of project work.

KR What kind of project work were you doing down in Idaho City?

JL Oh, in Idaho City, we would, we would build fence for some of the ranger districts, we would, oh we spent some time reconditioning a couple lookout towers, we dismantled a lot of old telephone line that was abandoned, we maintained telephone line that was still in use out in the woods. Oh, what else did we do. Some kind of construction work, we would oh, related to fences or signs or, you know, stuff like that. Basically fix-it-up type stuff around ranger stations and then these jobs in the woods maintaining phone lines and stuff.

KR You said Idaho City is small community.

JL Yes.

KR Was there a night life?

JL We were it.

KR You were it, the smokejumpers.

JL Let me tell you, if there was ever a town that belonged to smokejumpers, it's Idaho City.

KR How's that?

JL There were about four or five bars there and we accounted for perhaps, I'd like to say, 80% of their business, I suppose that's an exaggeration, but it surely was a significant portion of it. That town almost belonged to us. I mean, if somebody came there from out of town, some people from Boise would come out once in awhile just to kind of see what the hicks are doing out there. It's an old gold mining town, it was a big town,
turned out a lot of gold out of that area. This is Boise County. Uh, but now, it's virtually a, now I understand it's kind of a quaint little place where a few people are moving in and restoring old places and stuff like that. But then, it was just a, you know, on the edge of being a ghost town and we frequented by and large about four bars, we'd kind of go from one to the other to, you know, and we hit 'em pretty regularly. Uh, it was pretty, it was kind of a throw back of the old West, I mean, fist fights and the whole shootin' match. Once in a while some smart guys would come out from Boise and one thing would lead to another and you know, somebody'd get hit sometime. I basically managed to stay out of most of it, to tell you the truth, but once in awhile again, you can't, you know, if there was three or four of us together, you felt like, everybody's gotta kind of cut a wide swath around you, you know, and that basically happened. I can't remember anybody comin' to Idaho City and leaving thinkin' they got away with something.

KR Right, I don't think so, it doesn't sound like it.

JL And some women would come out from Boise and would be the object of quite a bit of attention. We used to think we had an obligation, you know, not to disappoint 'em. Uh, pretty, you know, pretty arrogant bunch, by and large, I'd have to say. A feminist would have a real problem with our behavior. I happen to be a feminist now, but at the time, we took kind of a fairly, fairly basic view of womanhood and our role in society at that point.

KR So there's an ego trip involved?

JL No doubt about it, no doubt about it.

KR Is it because you jumped or because you fought fire?

JL Probably the jump part, a lot of people fight fires in this part of the country, but not everybody jumps to 'em. You know, we used to kind of torment the ground pounders and just, you know, just kind of poke fun at 'em, let 'em know who'd walk to fires and who didn't. We'd be messin' around the forest station, you know, at Idaho City and a couple of 'em would come walkin' by and whatever we'd be doin', we'd just kind, we'd go, "Pound, pound, pound", in beat with their footsteps and they'd hear us of course, I mean, that was the object, just kind of look straight ahead and mind their own business. One time we had kind of a serious duke-out with the pounders and we got kind of chastised by the ranger the next day, where it got a little bit out of hand. But they kind of resented that treatment, but they all wanted to be, they all applied to get into jumpers the next year. It was one of those things where we just were, it was just a fun thing and some of 'em did, you know, and once they were in, it was, they were jumpers, not pounders.

KR When you were on a fire, big fire, and you had ground crews come in, and the fire wasn't under control yet, and there you
are, working shoulder to shoulder next to the ground crew, did a
comraderie develop or was there still that, that, I don't want to
say split, but that feeling of "hey, you walked in, I jumped in."

JL No, none of that. That distinction was just a fun thing
that, you know, it's the kind of thing that makes you wear a
letter jacket to go down to the soda fountain, you know, but when
we're on a fire, it's all, well, the fire is still goin' good,
there's some goofin' off when you know the fire's beaten and it's
just the mop-up stage, but when you're on a fire, it's,
everybody's here to get this fire out, none of that stuff.

KR So there was the comraderie?

JL Oh sure, I mean, it was just, it's comraderie of hard work,
it doesn't matter who you're standing next to.

KR Do you remember any big fires, '64?

JL Uh-

KR Any particular fires?

JL '64, didn't have any fires of note. We had, I can't remember
the names of them, they're all named for geographic locations,
you know, and I never had, paid that much attention to 'em.
These place names are kind of familiar to guys from the area, you
know, but, you know, I'm not from the area. There was one on the
Idaho City district that was a real bitch. It crossed the cat
line a couple of times and we all got pretty sick from, we spent
the night in the smoke, really without even knowing it and we
were all in pretty bad shape the next day, But we controlled it
during the night and you know, were, there were ground crews on
the fire too, by that time. When I was, my third year, we were
on a couple larger fires, one was about a hundred, two hundred
acres in Nevada and we jumped it from McCall while we were in our
refresher training area. And that was real high altitude fire,
10,000 feet or something like that, real high. And that was
particularly exhausting because it was just a high elevation.
God, it was, you know, you work five minutes, you had to stop and
catch your breath, you know, especially a flat-lander like me,
from Minnesota. And we walked off that fire and it was, you
know, it was pretty and it was just strictly jumpers, it was high
and remote.

KR Is it any different jumping in that higher altitude?

JL It is because, you know, as you appreciate, parachutes work
better in denser air and whatever conditions would cause it to be
less dense, either low humidity, high altitude, hot afternoon,
you know, any of those factors, would, means your parachute works
less and you hit harder. That happened to be a hot afternoon at
a high altitude and it was a tough jump and we jumped at a low
altitude because it was windy and it was the kind of jump where
somebody could've gotten hurt. And I think maybe somebody did
get hurt on the jump, I don't recall, but, I remember one guy fell through the, we did, jumped in two-man sticks, and one guy fell through the lines of the guy below him and I'm sure someone else would remember the names, I don't. I remember the incident. I was on the ground watching them come in. And they tried for awhile to disentangle, but they couldn't do it, they had two canopies, but they were just intertwined, and they finally just hugged each other and came in like a cargo chute, you know, like an equipment bag on a cargo chute and I know they hit hard, boy.

KR But they were okay?

JL Yeah, they were okay. Some guys jumped very low on that fire, as I recall, like under a 1000 feet which is supposedly not permissible, even for jumpers, but it doesn't give you a lot of leeway if something happens, if something goes wrong. I jumped at about 1000 feet, myself, on that fire and I think guys jumped maybe a 100 feet lower than that, by the time the last guys were out. Uh, you know, the wind was picking up and I think every pass over it, the Doug came in a little lower.

KR What's it like going out on a fire after you've been out partying the night before?

JL Uh, can be tough, frankly. I remember oh, you know, this may not sound so hot, and we wouldn't, you know, we kind of knew what the prospect looked like the next day and we would kind of control ourselves if it looked like we were gonna be busy the next day, but once in awhile, things would surprise you. We jumped, we didn't jump it, but a couple of times we went looking for a plane crash the next morning without any fire activity. Well, you know, a couple of guys are under the weather in a situation like that. I think I jumped one fire where one of the crew was just incapacitated and we just said, you know, you just hunker here, and when you get to feel better, join us in the line, we knew that we were gonna control the fire, if we thought we couldn't, we would have asked for more help. I don't recall an incident and I don't think one happened where someone was incapacitated and hurt the effort other than just making a little bit more work for the other guys. I don't think the objective suffered as a result of that, cuz even hung over guys were good workers. I remember one time we had to remind a guy he didn't have a reserve parachute on when he was sitting in the door, uh, and that sobered him up pretty quick, but we got a reserve parachute on him and that was all right.

KR Were you ever...

JL He wasn't in the door, but he was gettin' ready.

KR Yeah, I was gonna say, if he was in the door you don't tap him on the shoulder and say, "By the way", you just kind of jump on him, "Don't go." Were you ever in any life and death situations that you particularly remember where maybe you were in a rescue jump or somebody was in a situation that called for
immediate action, maybe jumped in a tree and it was let-down and it was awkward or whatever?

JL No, I never was on a fire where someone was in real danger, or in a situation where someone was in real danger. The guys that jumped on that plane crash that killed my, one of my trainers and the pilot, that was a pretty nasty situation, I guess, but it was clear they were dead. We were trained in getting people out of the woods quickly, but I don't recall any incidents the three years that I jumped where we actually did it. We never jumped any fires that were at a dangerous point where you, you know, you land on the wrong side, you might get burned up. I don't think that happened while I was jumping. Some, one guy on a fire I was on, jumped into the fire one time, but it wasn't at a point, it wasn't where, you know, it was gonna kill him. I remember a couple of us helpin' to catch his chute and everything and I think it was Gene Hobbs, as I recall, and he ran out of the fire in his smokejumper outfit, you know. But it wasn't gonna, it wasn't gonna kill him, but it was gonna destroy his gear, you know, and we were, we tried to save the parachute and stuff, I mean, you know, we were conscientious about saving the gear. My gear got caught in a tree and burned up one time, though. I had this, I had a red sweater that I used to call my fire sweater, it was an old wool sweater, it'd get cool at night in the mountains and I always had this packed in my firepack and got hung up in a tree on one fire and the fire got to it and burned it up and by the time we got that tree down and got my pack, the handles were burnt off my gear and stuff like that. Well, the arms were burnt off the sweater about at my elbow but the rest of the body was okay. I'd wear that sweater into town once in awhile, you know, and Saturday night where there'd be some people from Boise comin' out, and of course, everybody had to hear it and I'd say yeah, I got my arms burned off, you know, but they grew back, you know, just obviously they knew they were being, fun poked at, but I kept that sweater for awhile, just to b.s. about it.

KR You betcha. So, was that tree on fire when you landed in it?

JL Oh, that was my equipment chute, you see, my fire pack.

KR Oh, your equipment chute, okay.

JL Yeah, I, I didn't land in the fire myself, but my gear got hung up in it.

KR You mentioned a plane crash awhile ago.

JL Yes.

KR What was that about?

JL Um, it was after, it was my ned year as I recall, '64, and...
KR Your ned year?

JL Right, that's what you call a new man, yep, first year. Uh, the Idaho City contingent had moved on to Idaho City from McCall and it was maybe, it was real, fairly early in the season. And I was out on a fire and we got kind of scattered reports that there had been a plane crash and we didn't know, we'd picked it up on our radio and we were on a fire and we didn't know if it was our plane or what. It turned out it was a Beech from McCall, had dropped four jumpers on a fire the same time we were out, and they swung around and dropped the gear, and never came back and the spotter, who was "Moose" Sawyer and the pilot were killed. It appeared the plane just went right straight into the ground, nobody was sure why it happened or how it happened. The funeral was in McCall about four or five days later and it was a pretty somber proceeding, I'll tell you.

KR When that kind of thing happens, I mean, he was your trainer, and you're flying in the planes all the time.

JL Indestructible type guy, you know, I think, as I recall he was a former well regarded wrestler and schoolteacher and just a fine individual, tough as nails, the kind that you'd think, you know, you can't hurt this guy. I remember we all felt pretty vulnerable then, it was a very sober event, but it didn't deter any of us from jumping, nobody quit. Wasn't much fun, though.

KR What did it do to morale?

JL It really was, it was a sad occasion cuz we all knew him and liked him. We didn't know the pilot that well, we knew who it was and you know, so forth, but knowing that he just didn't have a chance, you know, I mean, it was, it kind of brought you back to reality a little bit and you knew that you might be a tough individual, but if this plane crashes or something, it's all over. I'll never forget it, it was a real, a real sad occasion. Um, I mean, it reminded us that we were part of that unit I must say. It wasn't... everybody was there, that's for sure.

KR What kind of guys did you work with in those years, were they veterans, were they college people, were they non-college?

JL Uh, most of them were either crew leaders, guys that had been around there for awhile, were, tended to be school teachers, working during the summers. A few were kind of, you know, just kind of kicked around during the winter and came back in the summer, most of us were college students. It was a mixture of veterans and neds. You know, they're like five, six neds at Idaho City out of eighteen when I was a ned. The other guys had been there anywhere from two to three, four, five, a couple guys, ten years, that type of thing.

END OF SIDE A
KR You said there were some vets that you worked with, a lot of school teachers, and you went on to go into the military. Thinking back on the smokejumpers, was there a militaristic or any kind of similarities between the military and the smokejumper training or the way they operated?

JL It was culture shock when I went into the military. The jumpers were the kind of people the military wanted in the worst way, but they tended to have and several of the jumpers made excellent military people, this Satterwhite that is coming in today, he was a ROTC guy in college, I'm sure, he got shot up in Viet Nam, you know, the kind of people that tend to be leaders, they tend to be leader-types, just physically competent individuals and the kind of guys who know what hard work is and are not afraid of it, and, you know, get the job done and that's, the military is looking for that. The only part that doesn't match up well is the discipline type of stuff or the, should I say, loyalty to the service type thing. We knew, we worked hard when we worked and we got the job done well. We played hard and we took things with a grain of salt, you know, and we always, we had a high regard for our smokejumper unit, but trying to be pigeon-holed by the military would typically rub us wrong, if I could use myself as kind of a basis for comparison. I was in trouble from day one when I was in the military cuz they'd want you to just do things, don't ask questions, don't ask why, just do it and that typically didn't sit well. I know it didn't with me and I was always kind of looking for a way to mitigate this mindless discipline they like you to have. But again, as an example, so I was a bad attitude case when I was in the military, and I suspect that a lot of my buddy jumpers would have been, too, but probably do well. I graduated second, in infantry officer school out of maybe two hundred and thirty guys, about hundred and ninety graduated in my class, but there had been about two hundred and thirty in my class at one point or another, a lot of 'em washed out or, you know, fell back to other classes cuz they weren't progressing like the military thought they should. And I was offered a Regular Army commission, it was being in the top ten of my class and I said, told 'em, "Sorry, I'm not the least bit interested." And I was urged to go airborne and I said, "What for three practice jumps and three more years of this, three more weeks of this crap, push ups and stuff, you can have it", you know. I mean, the way they would jump, marchin' out the back of a plane landing in a field with a chute you can't steer, you know, that wasn't my idea of a good time. So, it was culture shock in that we were loose and kind of went our own way in the jumpers, made our own decisions. You know, we were expected to make decisions, ya know, on a fire and stuff like that and you know, so fittin' into the, it was easier being an officer than an enlisted man, frankly, cuz as an officer then, you know, you're not given so much crap and you have, you have some discretion, you're kind of the one calling the shots, ya know. And that set better with the smokejumper mode of operation. Being in basic training you know, it wasn't that
difficult, but just having to put up with that garbage was a real struggle. And frankly, I got in more fights when I was in basic training with would-be leaders than I ever, than I did the whole time I was smokejumping. I used to just whale on 'em, when we'd get 'em in a, you know, we'd be practicing hand-to-hand or you know, using this cudgel stuff that's supposed to be reminiscent of a bayonet. Each buddy, the other guy would have a helmet on and some of these phony individuals that were there two weeks longer so they got this temporary strike, then all of a sudden they were a squad leader or something. A lot of 'em liked to lean on you, the basic training in the military really brings out the, it's hard to describe without getting, using some vulgar language. And there's some wimps that were always fun to push them aside, you know, they're gettin' whaled on and then step in and take on one of these turkeys and work out some of your frustrations.

KR You came out of smokejumpers pretty physically prepared for basic.

JL Yes.

KR Then, also I have a feeling from listening to you, not an ego problem, but a sense of self-confidence about your own judgment, in smokejumping you're thrown into some tricky situations, you're responsible for your life as well as your buddy's life, if it's a two-man fire or a three-person fire or whatever and in a way it was hard to let that go and be a robot for the military.

JL No question about it, it was like let's play some child's games, you know, and I didn't want to play child's games. But, you know, the military's geared, you know, at a low level so that all these people comin' into it, you know, they all can make it. And it was, some of the physical specimens that come into basic training in the Army, you can't believe, I mean, you arm 'em with a rifle and it's enough to scare you, you know. If they don't kill themselves, they are going to kill somebody else, is the way you feel. And it would have been fun sayin', "Hey, let's dispense of all this crap, you know, put me where I'm supposed to be and tell me what the job is to be done, don't give me all this, don't subject me to all this garbage you gotta go through, you know, because everybody goes through it."

KR So smokejumping really had an impact on your years after it, is what I'm getting at.

JL Oh, no question about it.

KR Because of the experience, self-confidence, independence, etc.

JL Yes, especially the confidence, I guess. It was, it was very good for me, I was a decent jock in high school and a good student and everything, but it really, I kind of felt like my
self-esteem and confidence really came to fruition when I was a smokejumper. And I felt like, you know, I was not a bad, I was fairly competent individual, that's what I thought after I'd been jumping for a couple of years.

KR Sure, rightfully so. They don't keep people who are not competent around for a long time.

JL I presume that's true, I never made those decisions, so I don't know.

KR What do you think about women smokejumpers?

JL I'll tell you the truth, I couldn't believe it when I heard it, but I heard some nice things about this young lady that was given an award last night, it was the first smokejumper. And someone told me, she pulls her own weight. If that's true, that's great. I frankly, I would have a hard time believing that if it hadn't been told to me by somebody that knows her, was a jumper at McCall, or had talked to jumpers at McCall that work with her. I frankly couldn't imagine a female gettin' through that training and I, but if she can do it, it's strictly physical as far as I'm concerned, you know, I don't, like I told you earlier, I consider myself a feminist, I'm surely married to one, and, you know, I'm a lawyer, and I've sued people on sex discrimination, and I'm very supportive of, you know, equal, equality, the ERA, I'm all for it and I'm a supporter of equality in every way, but I had a hard time believing that a woman could pull her weight in the jumpers. And I'd have to, I'm being very frank with you,-

KR That's all I can ask for.

JL I can't, you know, it's still a little hard for me to believe, but I believe it if credible people tell me, but it's a little hard for me to accept a woman on a fire line knowing how hard that work can be, that she could keep up with, you know, a male counterpart. I guess, ya know, I almost, I feel so strong that way, or at least I did until last night, that I almost have to see it to believe it and I remember we had to pack back from, from a practice jump about five miles with a pack, they even packed some stones in our packs, you know, unbeknownst to us. And it was a killer, and it's a little hard for me to believe a woman, frankly, unless she's a real specimen, could do it and we, I packed off fires where it's just damned hard, you got a chain saw on top of all your gear and all, um, but out on a game trail instead of a road or something, but to me, it boils down to this, if she can pull her weight and it doesn't mean that everybody's gotta pick up an extra ten per cent to make up for it, that's fine. It's strictly a question, can she pull her weight like everybody else, that's, that's the bottom line.

KR Would you feel comfortable jumping with a woman?

JL Absolutely, if she was, you know, if she could pull her
weight. I hate to do it as a, as a political move, you know, here I've got to jump with this woman because she filed a law suit and won or it's a demonstration project, you know. That, that, I don't like phony things.

KR No, I was talking about, you know, if she's behind you on the jump line or on the fire call.

JL Right. So I mean, if it was just a demonstration for political motives, I wouldn't be a bit interested in it, but if she can pull her weight, that's, it would make no difference whatsoever, that'd be great. You know, I'm married now, so my wandering days are over, but I would have thought, "Hey, that's nifty." We, I mean, we kind of were you know, we had an idea of who looked good and who didn't in those days.

KR Okay. Did you go on any rescue jumps?

JL No.

KR No rescue jumps. How did you feel about yourself when you were a smokejumper in terms of, were you a professional smokejumper, were you a professional firefighter, how did you see yourself, what was your self-concept of the job you did?

JL We felt that, and I know I did and I believe the other guys did, too. We were the best firefighter you can buy, that's what we thought. And we thought, first of all, we can get there where other people can't and when we get there, we'll work the ass off of anybody else, that's what we thought about ourselves. Whether it was true or not, who knows, but I know that's what we thought and we thought, "truck us in or fly us in," you know, "ten of us are twenty other anybody else," that's what we thought.

KR You jumped for three years, then you were drafted into the service and I'm assuming that after the service you used the GI bill and continued with your law school plans, you're an attorney now.

JL Yes.

KR Looking back from this day backwards, what are your favorite years?

JL Well, see that's eighteen years since I quit, and frankly, they were all good years. The military, basically was very good for me, it really helped me shed a lot of what I called "mental baby fat".

KR Yeah, I'm not, I guess, by good years or favorite, I'm just your highlights, your favorites. You know, all our years are good for us, I mean we can always justify 'em by some means, but what are your favorites?

JL Favorites, favorite years.
KR Was smokejumping favorite years?

JL Yes, they were. I wanted to go back every year after I was drafted, every year, I missed 'em, I had guys that I knew who were still jumping, some of 'em are still jumping. That's, the summers out here were so fantastically fun. I wanted to get back in the worst way. And it just never became possible and when I came through here about eight years ago, I realized that it was never gonna happen, and my buddies then said, "Hey, Jim, come on back, you can, you're in good shape, you can, you know, love to have you." But it was impossible, and it was different, frankly, in my view, those years at Idaho City can't be recaptured. It'll never be the same. Smokejumping, the jumpers, basically the same guys and good guys, but we could get away with stuff then that, that you can't today and you can do stuff when you're 20 that you can't do when you're 30. One time we brought squirt guns into a strip joint in Boise and drove the stripper off the stage. You can't do that today, you know, you'd land in jail. We thought that was a lot of laughs, you know. And that kind of silly stuff, and we did some silly stuff.

KR Do you remember your last jump?

JL My last jump.

KR You'd been to your draft board, you knew that you were going into the service, you didn't know it was your last season, but you knew that your jumps were numbered.

JL I don't believe I do, to tell you the truth. I remember the last, I remember the last time I was out in the airplane, it was a jump I didn't want to make cuz the termination party was the next night and I was leaving shortly after that and I had a hot date for the termination party and it would have just been a bitch of a fire. It was windy, it was in a slough area, it was low, it was obviously gonna be bad mosquitoes. The logs were stacked up like pick-up sticks, you couldn't see the ground. There's no way you'd find a place to, there was no jump spot. You'd land in criss-cross logs, the fire would have been helacious and just nasty and I was, I thought, it was probably the only time, if I had been given a choice, I would have said, "I don't want to jump this one." It was the only time.

KR Did you end up jumping?

JL No, we uh, the streamers took off like you wouldn't believe, and they ended up finally gettin' ground pounders into 'em, but we went up, it was on the Payette Forest as I recall and we flew up there with two Beech loads full, eight guys total, but we didn't jump it, it was just too windy. And when we and we made several passes droppin' streamers and they just took off and they took off in different directions each time. I'm not sure it would have made any difference cuz there was no jump spot anyway, but, and finally Smokey Stover, the foreman at Idaho City, said, "We're goin' home." And everybody goes, "Yeah!" Nobody wanted
to jump that day.

KR It doesn't sound like it.

JL Oh, it would have been the pits. Anyway, we were looking forward to the termination party. But I don't remember my last jump.

KR Do you want to jump again?

JL I would love to jump again. Not smokejumping, full time.

KR Skydiving, or something?

JL Parachuting. Skydiving, frankly I love having a parachute over me. And a lot of guys, former jumpers, have enjoyed parachuting, the sensation of floating down. I'm sure a lot of them skydive too, and I would like to try it. I was hoping somebody would think here at this reunion, "Hey, let's work up some deal where guys could get a jump if they wanted." But, as an attorney I know that's just not feasible. Who could pay their insurance premiums. You know, you look around, some of us are not too bad, but you get some of these old guys are getting a little brittle and some of them a little over weight. You know, just from the safety standpoint, I knew that was just not feasible, but, boy I would loved to have. In fact, I was late getting back to the motel from golf and my wife was worried that there had been some kind of a scheme cooked up and that I was in an airplane.

KR We have this fire back here on [Mount] Sentinel, what went through your body, your mind, when you saw that smoke. What goes through your psyche when you see smoke on a mountain?

JL Well, my first feelings were regret and envy because I knew there were guys on there and I wasn't one of them. And I was with a couple of jumpers at the time and I made a joke... we were heading out to the airport as a matter of fact, we were just going to take a look some of the planes and run through the fire depot. Maybe we ought to suit up and get in the plane, huh? One of them said, "Lindy, if they are so desperate they have to get to us, this whole city's in trouble." And it was true of course. So, it was a regret.

KR Did your heart pound faster?

JL Oh sure, it's exciting to see the smoke. I mean, it's like... it's that feeling of competition except it's a fire. You've never wrestled probably or played football, competitive football, or I don't know if you've ever been in competitive sports, but it's that you get kind of a feeling in you, you get butterflies, you know.

KR I've fought fire.
JL  Have you?  Well, then you probably know the feeling.  You know, it's like you're comfortable and everything, but soon you're going to be in a situation where you're going to be taxed. I mean, your going to get exhausted and tired and dirty and it's like looking forward.  I always compared it to knowing you are going to start a football game.  You are during the day in class and stuff and you're going to start in a football game that night.  You're going to be in a starting lineup.  And, you think about it, all of a sudden your body's crashing and there's some guy that's looking at you and is going to try to stick your head in the ground if he can.  And it's that feeling, you're going to be taxed.  You're going to be challenged.

KR    Have you found that in any other thing that you've done since smokejumping?

JL    Yes.

KR    Your other hobbies, what kind of hobbies do you have?

JL    It's not hobbies that I find it, it's my work.  I'm a trial attorney.  And the feeling of walking into the court room where you don't know the outcome, it's going into a true trial situation where it's another competent individual on the other side who is going to do what he can to skewer you.  And it's a dog eat dog, it's like wrestling, it's competitive.  It's the same thing that makes a trial attorney is what would make a jock or a smokejumper, you know, kind of enjoying that feeling that you get.  It's kind of unpleasant in a way, but it's kind of pleasant in a way, it's kind of fulfilling or satisfying.  It's some of that stuff that makes competitors competitors.  And I never felt it as bad as a lot of people.  But still, that feeling you get in your stomach is kind of... ah... you know you're alive.  And when it's all over, the satisfaction.  You finish a trial, especially if it comes out well, you think you did well.  It's a feeling of... it's kind of a high and it's satisfying.  And that's a part of it, having it over.  It's part of the fun.  And the satisfaction that comes from it.  Sure my adrenalin started flowing, seeing that smoke.  They were talking, "Hey, that's a hot spot there."  I mean, I kind of wanted to be in a situation where my reactions to it meant something.  Of course they meant nothing.  Nobody cared what I thought about that fire.  And a little bit of envy.  If this was twenty years ago and I was on my way to that fire, I'd be important, I would... I'd have a role in this thing.  I'd be part of the action and I'm not.  And reading about fires, being in Minnesota and reading about fires out here, getting a letter from one of my buddies saying, "Yeah, it's been a hot summer, we're getting jumps all over."  Just about breaks my heart.  And I've kind of gotten over that now in eighteen years.  And knowing that the life is just different, than the hell-raising life we had eighteen years ago.  It's helped.  It was good for me to see the life eight years ago when I was here.  It was tamer, calmer, people were married, lived in homes, in apartments.  I lived in barracks and we were raising hell every night.  Almost literally.  It's just different and it
was the old feeling, you can't go back. You know, that's what it made me think. And it kind of settled some restiveness that I'd had for that ten year period. And I decided, you know, I could have gone back if I'd just wanted to foreclose other things that I was doing. I always could have gone back, but I wanted to do the other things that I was doing more by that time. I still love the jumping, but I love what I'm doing too.

KR Do you keep in close contact with your buddies that you jumped with.

JL Maybe four or five of them are better friends than others, I spent more time with them, we are just better friends. They're all good friends, some are just better. And I might not communicate with them for three, four years at a time, but when I do, it's the same. It's like it was last year. And that happened during this reunion.

KR That's nice. That's real special.

JL The durability of those friendships, I mean, you've probably heard people talk about it. In my view it's... it's true and I've never experienced it anywhere else. I've got maybe one friend that I was in Korea with in the army that... and he would have been a smokejumper, same kind of guy, would have been a smokejumper. And that's probably my only comparable relationship that I've had elsewhere. And I can not hear from him for four years, but when I get a letter from him or call him on the phone it's just like the old days.

KR Jim, I don't always ask all the right questions or I might not ask questions that... something you have in mind that you'd like to put on this tape. Are there some stories, some funny spots, something that you'd like to share that I'm not getting on?

JL Oh, well, I've got a lot of stories, I'm not sure whether anybody else would be interested in them. Just a ton of stories that college kids could tell you. They weren't specifically related to forest fires. If there was a unique story, I guess that I'd have to say the nudist colony fire jump was one, although I wasn't one of the jumpers on the fire. I remember electing to jump one time when I could have stayed in the plane, and got hurt. I hurt my ankle pretty badly. I remember telling, Dick Graham was my spotter, and he said, "It's too windy to jump." I said, "It's not too windy to jump," I was a ned. And he said, "You're going to bust your ass." And I remember saying this, "It's my ass." And he said, "All right." And I busted my ass.

KR Did they have to jump somebody down to help you or pack somebody in?

JL No. I'd jumped with a guy named Tom Decker who was in a seminary at the time. And I was hobbled, boy I hurt my ankle.
They choppered me off and it wasn't broken, just badly sprained. I was in a cast for a couple of weeks. And I can remember, it wasn't all right, fine, but I wanted to get back on that jump list and it looked like we were going to jump in the next day and I cut that cast off and told Smokey Stover, foreman, "I'm ready to go." As I recall I didn't jump that day, but it was soon thereafter. And I made it OK, but I felt a little silly. I was on crutches for a while. I am sure Dick Graham would remember that if I reminded him of it. Otherwise I didn't get hurt. I don't recall any of our guys getting hurt very bad when I was jumping. Everybody had some close calls. It's amazing how many close calls you'd have. But I remember my next jump after hurting my ankle. Stover never did quite believe that I was OK. And when I was sitting in the door of the Beechcraft, he said, "You know a big tree is a soft landing." And what he was telling me was, if you land in a tree on purpose I'm not going to get after you. And I did land in a tree on purpose. And so I wasn't going to hurt my ankle worse and I got on OK.

This might be an amusing story for you. We were on a fire with pounders on it. And I was working with a pulaski on the fire line, jumpers around, working hard, it was a going fire. Son of a gun I was working with the grub hoe part of the pulaski and I took a swing at something and I hit a root that I didn't know was there and by golly the thing rebounded out of there right into my leg just like I'd hit a rubber tire with it. And it cut my leg over my shin bone here, bad. And it was bleeding and there were pounders on either side of me and I went "umph" and looked to see if any had noticed. And nobody had noticed. And I worked along and I wasn't going to admit to these pounders that I had just cut my leg with an ax, geez if there's anything I could do, it was to use the tools. And I thought "I'll never live this down if anybody here knows that I just cut my leg with this damn ax, pulaski." So I worked along, about an hour later we were getting the thing under control and my pant leg was all soaked with blood, you know. And I rubbed dirt and ashes on it and stuff, so nobody noticed it. And finally we got our break and the blood was running in my boot and stuff and I went and found Ken Smith, and I said, "Ken, can you spare me for a little while here, I've got to deal with this cut in my leg." And he laughed because it was clear I just covered it up, so I didn't have to let these pounders know I'd cut myself. I may still carry the scar from, yeah, I do. And I remember I had blood soaked pants and I wore those pants for the longest time with that big blood stain in and my buddies enjoyed the story. I confided it to them later. But those pounders never knew that I was... you know they took me to the hospital for stitches and I got back to the base and everything, those pounders never knew I'd done it.

And when I got drafted everybody had a good time with me. They bought me a GI Joe outfit including the green beret, the whole schmeree. I wore that... I went back to talk to the draft board and they said, "Fine, we'll not touch you until the end of the fire season at least." So here I drove back out to Idaho City. The foreman says, "God damn it, we've already taken photos, we thought there was no chance we were going to see you
again." And every fire after that I jumped wearing this green beret. We never wore hard hats or anything, you know, I mean we kind of had them. I've still got that green beret. It's got borate stains on it and everything else. Smoke and the ground pounders thought I was just nuts. But everybody had a good time with me being drafted. When I came in off project work the day my draft notice came. Here Jim Weaver and a bunch of jumpers came in kind of a funeral procession and they were humming a funeral dirge carrying this envelope. I new what it was. That's about the way I felt too. God, it was hard to take. It was like an infant being stripped from its mother or something, that's the way I felt. Those guys were staying and I'm leaving, just me. In the army. Hard to take.

Oh, here's a story you might be interested in. Idaho City is this old gold mining town, right. Well that town... all there is is rocks around that city because it's all been washed for gold, placer mining. A good friend of mine, Bill Rember, from Idaho City, we were neds together and he was in geology at the University of Utah at the time. The only area in that county that hadn't been washed thoroughly for gold, a couple of times over mind you, was the main street of Idaho City. Even the buildings on the side had been moved back and the earth washed for gold, and the buildings moved back on it. A long time ago of course. And we went out and panned for gold and found gold. On a weekend we'd say, "Let's go pan for some gold," and we go find some. And he would know where to look cause he's a geologist. He says, "You hit a rock shelf where the earth has kind of filtered down to it, that's a collecting point for the denser materials, and we'll scrape that off and we'll find gold there." And we did, OK. Well, here they were chewing this main street of Idaho City to put some kind of a... I don't know if it was a sewer line or I still don't know if there's sewers in Idaho City to tell you the truth, but they had dug up with a backhoe a portion of the main street and Bill says, "Hey, that's the only ground around here that hasn't been washed." So one noon hour he and I go down there, jump in the hole, and here about three or four feet below the surface here's a clay seam and Bill says, "This is just like rock because it's impermeable to gold." And so we scraped the earth off the top of this clay seam, brought it back in a garbage can to the base and there's a little creek running through the facility in Idaho City and we panned that and Holy Cow, nice color. Not enough that it's going to make you a lot of money. You know gold was $35 an ounce then.

KR Do you still have it today?

JL Well, I've got just a sample of it, but I gave a lot to him, he made the most handsome ring out of it that you can imagine with the jumper wings embedded in it. Just enormous heavy, gold ring. And of course now that stuff is so expensive, but then it was no big deal. Well, people came and saw us working with this stuff and we found an old sluice box, it was up in the attic of one of one of the buildings there. And we were getting good color out of this and a crowd gathered and one of the assistant rangers went down town with a garbage can and by God he came back...
with a garbage can full of dirt. The word spread and it was broadcast on a radio station from Boise, "There's been a new gold strike in Idaho City." And by God if tourists didn't start coming out to Idaho City to collect cans of dirt. And the workmen were upset, you know, they're trying to work and here's people trying to get down in their hole. Finally they just took a big pile of dirt on the street and told people, "If you want some dirt, there's a pile of it." And these people came and were filling garbage cans full of dirt out of this pile. And of course we knew that you can't just get loose dirt and find gold in it. So we got a big laugh out of it. And the progress of the gold strike was reported for about two days in the Boise broadcast media, but then nobody was coming into the assayer's office there to sell gold so the coverage of it just ended. We sure got a lot of laughs out of that, starting that new gold rush in Idaho City. And I've got a little plastic case with panned gold as a souvenir, I have it at home. And Bill got just a gorgeous ring out of it, it may have three ounces of gold in it, I don't know, but it's some ring, I wish you could see it. And that was fun. That was Rember and I, that's one of the few things that I was actually party to that was really interesting. Other than that it was just basic ash and trash that every jumper can tell you, just anecdotes.

KR Sounds like those years were real important to you.

JL Oh, fantastic. Told those stories, you know, my wife has heard just about all of them. But you can take this for what it's worth. They're true. I swear to God it's true. There was so much of this fun stuff compressed into those time frames, I mean, it was kind of an exhilarating life because you just had a lot of fun, lot of hard work compressed into a very small time frame.

KR Well Jim I really thank you for taking this time to do the interview. You have a lot of good things to say and I'm glad you took the time to stop by put them on tape.

JL I'll probably always say, "They're the best years of my life." Special. You know, I love what I'm doing, but in terms of just the freedom we had, and the hard work and the hard play, and the excitement that ran through it. When you're sitting in a door and you're not a smart ass, you know, I mean really your juices are flowing. And it never got old for me, but I just jumped three years. Never got old for me, I'd do it today in a second... all things equal I'd do it today in a second. But things aren't equal.

KR Thank you.

JL My pleasure, Kathy.

END OF INTERVIEW