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Francis Lufkin interviewed by Kim Maynard on June 7, 1984, for the Smokejumper Oral History Project. OH #133-61.

KM OK, do you maybe just want to say your name and when you started jumping?

FL Yeah my name is Francis B. Lufkin and uh, started jumping, actually I made my first jump in 1939, October, 1939 and there was kind of the tail end of the experiment that was held here on the, then Chelan National Forest. And there was oh, half a dozen jumps left over in the contract so they let four or five of us jump it and see at the time and then the next spring, 1940, is when we did some training. And between our training jumps and then the parachutes were being packed, why, we'd go uptown and try to discover a way to let down. You're getting out of a tree, or what we'd already been doing. A fellow by the name of Harry Tuttle and I worked on the experiment all the way through getting the professional jumpers down, but usually we'd just go up with spurs and ropes and we'd have to usually lift them up out of their harness to get them unhooked and then let them down on a rope. So we had to... each individual had to be responsible for getting himself out, and we knew that. So if you couldn't get up on a limb to take up the slack and relieve the tension on your lines, why, you were just going to be stuck there.

KM Yeah.

FL So we developed a way that we could get out and from then on, that way on, why it just gradually developed into what it is today. And it was through kind of trial and error and trying this and trying that and several different methods we used all through the years to get out. We finally got into these, these quick hook-up outfits that you can get out pretty fast, and... such as that. So that's uh, some of the early part that I was connected with. It's been a real interesting life in it anyway.

KM I bet, yeah. What uh, what was it like in those first few years when they were planning it out and...?

FL Well it was uh, seemed to be a kind of a touch and go situation in there with all the finances and then it just wasn't accepted everyplace either. That is, everybody felt that a parachute jumper was crazy and... but to me it was, looked like something that could develop into something and the fact that I was about the top of the ladder at that time on the ground pounder outfit with $100.00, about $135.00 a month. And they tentatively said, well this would be about $2,300 a year which would be about $196.00 a month. And at that time, that much difference in salaries was a lot of money. That was even more than most of the rangers made at that time, in the late thirties. So it was uh, of course I had the opportunity to work on the experiment and getting these fellows out. That was part of my job to get up there early in the mornings and they usually build a fire that... so we would put green boughs on it when the airplane come over so they could tell which way the wind was
blowing and then they would use that as a drop spot to put out their drift chutes which at that time were the seven by seven burlap with ten pounds of sand on it. And they would drop that and then they would circle and circle and then at that time too, nearly all of the jumps were made at 3,500 feet, those experimental jumps. Because they were using rip cords and they wanted plenty of time in case somebody forgot. But, uh.... So I had the opportunity of getting these fellows out of the tree and seeing this... these jumps being made and figuring all the time that there was a possibility that that would be an opportunity for myself. And the fact that some of those fellows was pretty tired by the time they would get down and, time we'd get out of a tree, so that was kind of a question in my mind is whether you were fit to fight fire after you made a parachute jump or not in the end. So I stayed with it all during that time and getting these fellows of the trees and getting cargo chutes out of the trees and things like that. And we did develop our little way then, which is pretty much used yet today, of trimming trees to get the shroud lines loose and getting the... getting the chute on out without doing a lot of damage. Because at that time they were silk parachutes and any damage to them just held the project up because they was using the same parachutes day after day. It was the same way when we first started our training. We only had one parachute per man and justbarely that, so any damage to the chute that would lay it up, why, they man was also laid up. So some of the things that were developed here now are still offshoots of the things that we did then and very much the same only different materials probably. And even before the project was over that, uh... Frank Derry had come up on the idea of using just some snaps in between the parachute and the harness in order to get the equipment loose quicker. But they were just ordinary parachute harness snaps and so they were used in between there then too and that gradually developed into these quick connectors and things that they're using today so...

KM Yeah, what kind of let down system did you develop for the...?

FL Well the first ones uh... we used usually about a... its was about a 75 to 100 foot rope which was, usually it's about 3/8 rope. And then along with that we carried about a seven or eight foot rope which is 1/4 inch. And we'd taken about a, oh a spike that was about eight, nine inches long and uh, bent it in the shape of an "S" and with that we tied one end of the rope, the small rope to that and then we'd hook up over head into the parachute risers and we would stick our foot in the lower part there, and pull it way up and tie it off and then we could stand up on that rope and that way got ourselves some slack. And later on, uh... we got to losing that rope sometimes, on the opening, or when they'd pull their main rope out of their pocket sometimes that little rope would fly out and lose it, so from there we developed a method of where a man could pull himself up and... he had to do it all in one motion, was pull himself up, and there's a little slack in that snap to quickly unsnap it.
FL But, that was just a... pretty squirrely that so many people couldn't do that, you know, and hold themselves up there for very long and you had to get it usually on the first snap or else you got pretty tired before you did make it.

KM Yeah.

FL So that was about the first let down then. But from there on why it just quickly developed into what it is today, too.

KM That great. What, um... so what were the first jumps like? What kind of...?

FL Well they were uh, I don't suppose they're no different than they are today as far as the jump itself is concerned but, of course to me everything was new and I'd never ridden in an airplane before and so I got all of my training... I knew just hearing the fellows talking that, what was going on but Frank Derry gave me my early training while I was putting my equipment on and, and then they stood me out by the airplane and he explained again to me about what, what to get up there and get out on the step and grab a hold of a bar that was there and get the other hand onto the rip cord and, because you never left the airplane then without one hand on the rip cord to make sure that you could get a hold of it. But... so, it was probably not over 30 minutes of training you might say at that time before you just went up and jumped. Because on the first airplane ride I didn't feel anything apprehensive or afraid or anything like that but the only thing that bothered me was that I got looking down at the spot and it, it seemed to me that I should be jumping but from that altitude why it took a long time to get up right directly over the spot. And finally I looked around at him and he, then he nodded his head and hit me on the shoulder and that's when I left.

KM Huh, same positioning as you have now.

FL Very much the same only we stood out on, on the step whereas now they set back in the door and one foot out on the step and go out the door. But then that was make sure you got clear of the airplane, and such as that. On our first fire jump then, I got in the door and Glenn Smith, we called him Smitty, he said I'm going right behind you. He was a professional jumper and so that's way we went out but that, I got out on the step and when I left why then he just came on out the door and we were together.

KM Yeah, wow.

FL But that was, we were still pulling our own rip cords then too so... That was probably one of the hardest openings I ever got too was on that opening. I had perfect position and I could see where I was and everything went on around me and the riser come around under my chin and snapped it and split my chin open.
It really made me see stars for a little bit, but then the Eagle parachute was a terrific hard opener anyway and, and uh, nearly every opening that I ever had with one of them why, I could see stars flying around in front of my face just... well I wasn't unconscious or anything like but it was... you could tell that you'd been rapped pretty hard. Then we jumped about seven times there, of course, then we were jumping twice a day. We'd get daylight and go jump and then we'd go home and eat breakfast and we'd usually work on our... that let-down until we had the chutes packed again and then in the afternoon we'd go jump again. Then we worked the rest of the day on this let down business and trying different methods. And this Smitty was the only rigger at that time so he'd pack the parachutes again, have them ready for daylight. And at that time too, we were jumping from 5,000 feet because Frank didn't know what new people were going to do or anything like that and so he made sure we got there high enough and, but towards the end then, he dropped it down to 3,500 feet above the ground. That's where we usually did our training with the rip cord outfits. So we got a pretty good ride out of it too.

KM I guess.

FL Yeah.

KM Did you have any steering, could you grab the...?

FL Oh yeah, those Eagles they were the finest parachute for steering, however, you couldn't buck a wind with them because they were just, practically tear right out of your hand and turn and go with the wind.

KM Oh.

FL But they had long steering, what they called ears, on them. And we'd pull those lines down and actually get a hold of that silk and just pull it in hand over hand and then when you got about half of your parachute pulled down, why, then they was really, they'd just snap and turn real fast and make a lot of racket. And they'd just almost got straight down then and that's the way you could buck wind with them was to... But if you didn't get them down far enough to where they would sink, that big long piece of silk hanging down there would act just like a sail and it would hold the wind and really take you then.

KM Oh, huh.

FL As long as you got it down to, to uh, actually collapse about half the parachute, it didn't collapse because you had a lot of pressure on it. And it was quite a chore holding that, that down there though. Then it would go, just practically straight down. But it would snap and pop up there just like it was shot gun going off.

KM Yeah, huh. What, how uh, how many years did they use the rip
Well we only used it about, one year, I think the first year, and then they, then I think it was the winter of 1940 then that Frank and Chet Derry worked on the static line situation over at Missoula. Because the military had watched that first year of jumping too and they went right back and developed the static line outfit. And so Frank and Chet worked on this and then they, I went over early in 1941 and also learned to be a rigger there at that time, but I made the experimental jumps on the... on that parachute for the, it was the CAA at that time, I made three jumps, so they could time it.

KM With the static line?

With the static line, but it opened so fast that they couldn't even time it. I made the three jumps for them, but he said it was just so fast that, way faster than what their, their minimum requirements were. It had to be a second and a half to be fully opened and those Eagle parachutes opened from the bottom and that, that was one thing that made them such hard openers that would shake you up, was they opened with such force that they'd just stop you right now. And then usually it'd jerk you up in the canopy a ways and then you'd come down and it'd open again. So it would... it always left marks on you, on your shoulders and on your back. In fact after seven consecutive jumps, I had practically green, blue-green, all up and down my back from one of those things that hit me. But soon after that then the war came on and the Eagle Parachute Company that made these, went into contract work for the military and so they didn't make anymore of those with the ears on. So that's when they got into the development of these round, flat type parachutes then that... because I'd used one, in 1941 I'd made one up into a chest pack myself because we were so short of parachutes that.... That was the year that George Honey and I left here and went over there and took all of our equipment and they... what finances they had here in this Region, they combined it with Region One so that they could make one, one small crew. Which was about 24 people in my hand, plus the, the administrator was Merle Lundrigan at that time. So we had three, actually, eight man crews, there was actually seven jumpers and a squad leader with each one of those crews. So that's the way we worked then the first year, and that's the first year, then we had the static lines. And most of the parachutes at that time were still the Eagles and of course they opened just as hard with a static line as they did with the... with the rip cord.

KM Hmm, and so after that they uh, the next year was it that they went to these new chutes?

Well they started, uh... I think, Frank started building some up then out, of kind of, surplus because.... Yeah so it was the next year then I made an experimental jump over there for, uh... for Derry and FAA out at Seeley Lake, Montana. We'd moved out there from Nine Mile and at the same time I made the experimental
jump on the parachute and also on the, on a radio that they wanted to see if it would take the bumps and things like, which it really did. About that time the, that was also the first slotted chute that we jumped.

KM Mmm mmm.

FL But it didn't have much maneuverability to it, at that time. Especially in comparison to the Eagle parachute so they could turn around and around. So you drifted pretty much with the wind but, about the following year then, they changed the position in the slots a little bit, and gave it more maneuverability. But had very little forward speed in comparison to the old Eagle and to what they have today.

KM Hmm, pretty fast decent rate too.

FL Well no it wasn't so fast unless you got to oscillating then when you oscillate and you're out almost 90 degrees from your parachute, you just fall off sideways is actually what happens. Then as your body comes back under, it picks you up and... But you get to oscillating why you just go down somewhat faster but your danger then is getting close to the ground and then your landing on side oscillation or something like that.

KM Yeah.

FL But you could stop them by [inaudible] the lines, the front lines and you could actually get a little forward speed out of the canopy. But being round and without any ears or anything like that on them, why you could turn them pretty well too, by using the riser or two or three lines, pull down on them, but you didn't gain too much.

KM No.

FL The main thing at that time, why you just wanted to be headed, looking in the direction you were going and landing that way, otherwise you land sideways or backwards or something.

KM Yeah, now most of these 24 people were previous Forest Service employees?

FL Yes. Yeah, at that time, see when I.... In fact I made my first jump, I'd had ten years experience and most of all the new guys that came on had some from two to maybe five or six years and things like that. That's what they wanted was people with fire experience and then they'd teach them the parachutes. The only exception to that was the first year that... on our crew here, we had, George Honey and I were old smokejumpers or smokechasers, and uh, [inaudible] Derry and Glenn Smith. They were professional jumpers from off of the experiment so they thought they would try that to see it and the following year Glenn... let's see, uh... Chet Derry jumped over on the Missoula crew. So that gave us, kind of a nucleus of parachute experience and fire
fighting experience.

KM Yeah.

FL Plus we had to have a parachute rigger here too so...

KM Mmm mmm, which was one of the Derrys?

FL No, it was Glenn Smith. He was a professional jumper and he jumped on the experiment.

KM And you had to get a rigger's license and...?

FL Yes, 1941 and that's... when I went over there early and we opened up a camp up there at Nine Mile and I'd made the two experimental jumps, or three experimental jumps in there at Missoula. From then on, why we went ahead with these new type of static line. Packs and things like that. So we had to go into business then and, and build a lot of those. Actually make them from the pack right on through, and at the same time we took a rigger's examination. The fellows that were going to be squad leaders and one or two other fellows they had there from Missoula. And that, at that time, that, uh... parachute riggers examination lasted three days. It was eight hours of just steady writing at, all long-hand questions and at that time you had to pack one each of each make and each type of parachute.

KM Really?

FL Yeah, you didn't have the opportunity to just pack one, but you had to pack all of those. Of course there was several different makes and each make had several different types in it, two to three types. Seat packs and back packs and lap packs and seat and such as that. And so it was quite a long examination but I got through that fine. I still have the same number today that I had at that time.

KM Oh yeah? Of you license you mean?

FL My rigger's license, yeah.

KM What kind of reserves were you using?

FL Well at that time, when we first started out, see, we went into this Eagle parachute and jumping into the timber. They thought they should have a larger parachute which they made up at the factory and they were 30 foot. The normal parachute that they used for professional jumping was a 27 foot. And so, that's what we used then was a 30 foot back pack and the 27 foot chest pack. Which was a big square pack that set right in front of you and uh... As I say the second year that I was in it, like there in '41, we didn't have enough back packs so I had taken a 27-foot chest pack and made it into a 27-foot back pack and that's what I used and then I used a 30-foot round flat pack parachute for an emergency.
FL So... but, when I jumped that why, it was really a better parachute than the 30 foot because, especially for me where I was... I probably weighed 160 pounds, why it uh, I got along real well and it would, guided real well and had, I could just do anything with it. And so from then on, if I had my choice of a parachute, well I got a 27-foot one.

KM Huh, that's great. So uh, then 19..., about 1942 we up to now?

FL Now '42, see, I stayed over here and, but I went over there to help Region One, and, uh... I think, let's see, Region One was training and I think... I don't think they had anybody from Idaho yet, I can't remember. But since I had a rigger's license and, and I went over there probably six weeks in the spring and I would help train there. And I trained riggers and was always... I made experimental jumps and things like that for Frank Derry and then I come back over here and I was a dispatcher up here at Winthrop, Anytime that we wanted jumpers, why they'd bring them over from Missoula and then I would, you would act as a guide or a spotter, or whatever and then I did the cargo work and such thing as that out of here with the.... And for several years then, that's the way it worked, until 19..., well 1944 then they took a squad and put them down on the Siskew Forest because they were having so many man cause fires there. And the following year, then I had a squad directly here. But we were still going over there and doing training there at Missoula because they were just, just didn't have that many people to train and furthermore, at that time, why there were these, the conscientious objectors.

KM Yeah.

FL And so, they didn't only stay maybe one year and some of them stayed and some of them are still jumping. So I went over there and trained... we just trained a whole bunch then, got kind of volunteers to come back to different bases and, which I had a 15 man crew here then. Then after the war, which was, it was about '45 I guess, is when the, the peaces met there in Germany. Then the following year, why, I started getting paratroopers, mostly.

KM Yeah, you say some of the conscientious objectors are still jumping?

FL Well I don't know if they're still, no, some of them are retired though, the fellows that worked for me. There was two of them that stayed with me until they retired.

KM Oh yeah?

FL Yeah, but they seemed to get along very well with the uh, fellows that just come back from the war, you know, the veterans.

KM Yeah. Great. What uh, were you using streamers then? And
how did you spot? Was it any different...?

FL Well at that time we used a drift shoot and we used drift chutes for several years after that.

KM The seven-foot burlap?

FL Yeah we used a seven by seven burlap with a ten-pound weight on it for a long time. Then we got down to where it was about a three foot square piece of muslin with usually eight cord, [inaudible] eight cord lines on it and maybe a, I forget what the weight on it, was a quarter pound or something like that and that's what we used then for several years until we got into the streamers. Now I don't remember just when we did get into the streamers but...

KM Hmm, what kind of range did you have when you were jumping with the planes? How far out did you go?

FL Well, originally the first year here on the Okanogan, that's what actually was the North Cascades, and that's what they were primarily interested in, and they didn't let us go on hardly any fires out of that area. So we didn't get too many jumps that first year. After that they seemed to say, "Well you just go jump anywhere where you can get to them quicker than anyone else." Because early in the season and that's in the lower country and you'd have fires that would go fast and, and you want to get them early too. Then as they went back, why, the fires would... usually the high country fires didn't amount to too much anyway unless they burned too long or something like that and got into a hot spell. But, then our ranges kept increasing with the, well, even of the airplanes. For years we used the... well like Missoula used the Tri-motors and some of those aircraft and we had the Noorduyn-Norseman over here. And then there was some military people in here hunting up some radar sites one time and I was helping them locate some points back here, and I ask him how slow one of those, was a Twin Beech at that time, how slow they would go and he showed me with a load in it and it was just real nice you know, slowed right down, very maneuverable and higher speed and I came back and I told Wally, Wally Tower at that time, and they got to negotiating and they got a surplus airplane, Twin Beech, from the Bonneville Dam and... Oh, where we were, taken us an hour, hour and a quarter to go like over to Port Angeles or over onto [inaudible] Peninsula, hour and a half just about. Why we'd do it in 45 minutes with a Twin Beech. So one [inaudible] they did away with the Noorduyn-Norseman and got into the Twin Beeches. But they still hung on to a lot of the old Travelaires, especially in Region One where the Johnson brothers, that's what they had primarily but they got into the DC-3's or DC-2's and things like that, too. Increased the speed and capacities and such as that.

KM Yeah, do you remember the dates of any of those changes?

FL No I don't. No, I can just remember them being made, but I
don't remember because the first Twin Beeches we got here, they
didn't have the right props on them and so they fooled around,
they traded those off and got uh, props with the... you know, so
they were adjustable which made them more efficient and faster
and better take off and just better performance. And those built
up and then they finally got into the, the other faster Beeches
like they've got out here now, 99's and such and that, but... I
know I, suppose I kind of made a nuisance out of myself to a lot
of the meetings because I'd started trying to promote those for
years because the thing that always bothered me was that they'd
buy new airplanes to haul the wheels around in, you know, wheel
planes, but the smokejumpers working out here in rough country
and down low and dropping cargo and things like that, we had to
use these old surplus aircraft that they... like went down to
Tucson and got them out of the junkyard there. They were
actually real good aircraft and things like that but they did
have a lot of bulletins on them and things like that that had to
be overcome and so we were using airplanes in there that 25, 30
and 35 years old you know and uh, then to see the new airplanes
come out for these people to ride around in just from place to
place, it didn't set very well with me so... But I see they
finally made the grade and they got newer aircraft. So I think
what bothered them so much was of course finances but, you go to
a big meeting that's all safety until you say well, these
aircraft are not too safe for smokejumping. You're down low and
they've got bulletins on them and things like that and... but
they finally come around to it, after I left anyway.

KM Uh huh, wow. What uh, what did you have for budget and...?

FL I don't remember what the budget was. For years, when I
first came on why the budget was all held... handled out of the
Okanogan office over here for this unit. Region One I think was
handled out of the Regional office over there. And a lot of it
was, even for here, handled out of the Regional office in
Portland.

KM Yeah.

FL But you see the thing was, a lot of the rangers didn't want
to give up any finances, or anything like that to chip in for
years, and finally they did it then. They just started taking
some off the top down at Portland and budgeted it here but...
Then finally we were treated the same as a Ranger District here
and we were given our finances just the same as a Ranger
District. Oh a couple, $300,000.00 or something like, that then,
and we always add the effect on the stuff to work off of too.
Especially early or late season fires and equipment replacement,,
and things like that. Well that's when we began to build up our,
our inventory and on parachutes and things like that, too. For
years we battered along on one parachute per man and finally we
got a few extras so that if we had to repair, why,, you would do
that during the night, or something, and get your people back
into action the next day.
KM Yeah.

FL The way it is now, well they have enough equipment so they can lay a lot of that aside and use it for winter work, or... which we did here you see. And also trading. Because before I left here, for several years we had the FAA qualified parachute loft where we could do actual rebuilding or we were regarded even as parachute manufacturers. Which, by the way, we were the first one in the Forest Service to have it here, too.

KM So you actually made the chutes yourself?

FL No we didn't build any because we bought them all on contract. But we did rebuild a lot of them, you know, they were torn up, or we could do the major repair work. Which you had to have this parachute manufacturer rating to do that. But we had it here for several years. However, being another government agency, we really didn't need that, but I felt it was a good public relations, you know, to have something like that. Because if something did happen, why, because we were actually exceeding a lot of the FAA regulations as far strength and such as that in our equipment. Things that we had to get into the trees and, and get our people down safely you know.

KM Yeah. So your position at, at that time was Base Manager?

FL Well, for years they called me an Aerial Project Officer but that's actually what it was. The first people we had in the Okanogan office that... and I'd been jumping probably four or five years then, and they said, "Well, that you got to make up your mind no whether you want to go out there and jump and be away from the base or whether you want to administer that outfit. And so from then on I did very little... I didn't jump on any fires, but I did some experimental work and things like that in the off season, things like that. Because I only ended up with about 59 parachute jumps total out of 33 years of service.

KM Which is mostly experimental training?

FL Yeah, I had a couple fires and that was about all of actual smokejumper fires.

KM Yeah.

FL But prior to that time, I had ten years of ground pounder service you see, I'd go on fires of all kinds.

KM Yeah.

FL But, so my actual job then was training. Then for years I was the only parachute rigger, too, so I had to train people to do that every year and train fire fighters and you just didn't have that kind of time to be out there fooling around jumping you might say. But that... my bosses made it pretty plain to me that either do one or the other so that's the way that turned out
then.

KM Were you involved in retardants, development of retardants?

FL Well, yes we, we didn't actually do any developing but we did some of the first reporting on other liquid retardants especially. Because that was... they first started that down here at Wenatchee and since we had a lot of people involved out here on the ground, we did make a lot of the reports on that liquid retardant and it's effects. In fact, after I left here and retired, I went up into Canada and worked with the Canadians about three summers, help them get started on this liquid retardant.

KM Oh.

FL So it was that experience then that...

KM Yeah.

FL That I put to use up there as well. But we used a lot of it here and different methods we used. Made it up in five gallon cans for the fellows to mop up with and things like that.

KM That you would drop to them?

FL Yes, we dropped it in cans to them to, if they had fire in the back country and then we... the regulations at that time said well, you had to go back in there and check that fire out or you had to stay an extra 24 hours on the fire to make sure it was out. And so, with this retardant we figured if we marked... mopped up with that why it would take the place of the extra 24 hours because it really did not only retard fire but it would actually extinguish it. So to mop it up in water was good but you never could be... you never had any faith in it because... so a lot of time after you would leave it, it would steam it dry, or something like that, and go on burning.

KM Yeah.

FL But this stuff, it didn't.

KM Which is similar to the same retardant you're using today?

FL This is the very same stuff we're using today yes, uh huh, yep.

KM What was the pay of people?

FL Well for years, uh... the second year over there they paid the squad leaders $2,300.00 a year and the uh, jumpers were $1,800.00.

KM Oh, so you were a squad leader?
FL Yes. The first year, 1940, they paid everybody $2,300.00 a year at that rate anyway, and then the second year they figured well, they'd just pay the squad leaders the $2,300.00 and the jumpers $1,800.00, so.... And then for, uh... oh, two or three years after... after the war it was still $2,300.00 then they gradually raised it, maybe a couple hundred dollars a year, or something like that.

KM And that's no hazard pay, no overtime?

FL No, it was 24 hours a day and seven days a week.

KM And were you paid for project work as well?

FL Well if we did any project work, why, at that time I'd either take the guys out on trail work cleaning trails or something here in the spring, and... more to give them exercise and uh, teach them how to get more work on cross-cut saws and axes and things like that. Then we finally got to jumping maybe three or four, usually about four, back like on one of the lookouts, let them work their way out, bring their equipment right with them. They could just saw their way right out, maybe ten miles of trail. If they didn't make it that day, why they could come on in that night, then go back and work it from the lower end the next day, walk in and things like that.

KM Yeah.

FL But we did a lot of timber inventory and things like that with smokejumpers and, and uh, which not only got the job done but increased their knowledge of the country and the timbers and the timber types and things like that. All the squad leaders especially, and a lot of the jumpers, why, they were qualified timber markers and cruisers, or scalers, and so they could go out here in the fall and take on a good job like that and, to help keep them on during the winter. Over until the snow drove them out and then I'd bring them in here to work on parachute equipment. Or we built tents and we built all kinds of vests and oh, just everything like that to them busy. And I have the sources of uh, oh, surplus equipment, all kinds of military parachutes, and things like that that we'd make into cargo chutes. And surplus canvas and nylon and webbing and just everything that we'd use here that I would get for nothing and we could make them up and all I would charge the Ranger District would be the salary of the man that did the work and normally that was, they could buy that equipment then probably at about a third of what it would cost them on the open market.

KM Yeah.

FL In fact when, eventually we got into a little trouble because the small business people they said, well you can't do that. But, we went ahead anyway because the Ranger just couldn't afford to buy it from a firm that wasn't as good of, wasn't as good of material nor the work wasn't as good on them, quality work. So,
well I guess maybe they have got that all stopped now, I don't know.

KM Yeah. But the development of your suits and that kind of thing, you made here?

FL We did a lot of it here, yeah. Actually Region One was kind of the head Region that, they were supposed to have the high powered engineering intellectuals over there, or something I guess, for a long time, but we did a lot of the development here. In fact, we started out on the harness that's being used now, one piece harness and... so it'd fit everybody. Used to be, when they started out, they had three different sizes of harness because you could only adjust them so far and then you had to fit them for each man. And they had to be fit up before you put the parachute on and took half an hour to adjust one of them. But we started on that here and got it going and then they took it over in Missoula and they gradually developed quite an engineering outfit over there anyway. But they'd usually take our recommendations and then go ahead and do the engineering on it over there and they would send it back for... we would do a lot of experimental work on it or with it, or such as that. But, well like the... I think the present let down, I think they're still using some of the ideas that we used here where it's installed in the suit and things like that. And the suit today is still very much like the first, the very first suit that was built. And the helmets are, outside of the materials and styles and things, it's the same idea all the way through.

KM Yeah, and were those your ideas or did that come from the Derry's or...?

FL Well that suit developed, uh... that was originally a copy out of a flying suit that the pilot used on the experiment and it's a, it all zipped open and everything like that but the, [Virgil] "Buss" Derry took it over to Seattle and there was a company over there made a couple of them up and, and they put the padding in. At that time it was felt padding and such as that. The uh, one that the pilot had here had kind of a wool lining in it and of course it was mostly for warmth.

KM Yeah.

FL But this other was for padding. And then they went to a... from that felt padding to sponge rubber and back to felt and then to the stuff that they're using today, and things like that.

KM What was the development of the cargo project here?

FL Well...

KM How did that go?

FL We, that was some of the first work that was done here was dropping cargo chutes into trees up there in the woods to see if
they would... that was, at that time they were all silk, to see if they would hang up or if they would tear them all to pieces or just what. But they were, usually hang 50 pounds on a, on a cargo chute and then just drop it into the timber. And, by the way, it was that same year that Derry put the first slots in the parachute because he put them in a cargo chute and, which actually stabilized the parachute and things like that. But he didn't go with that 'till a couple years afterwards in the backpack equipment. But Derry did a lot of the... like the cargo sacks and the canopies, and the sack that they're stored in now was his development over there in Missoula. Then once we came back here and made up and at that time I started getting, oh about '42 or '43 I guess, started getting surplus paratrooper equipment and so I was making those all into cargo chutes. And we did a lot of the cargo dropping here and as I say in '42, along there, that, well my job there during the summer...

[END SIDE A]

[BEGIN SIDE B]

FL But, actually the cargo dropping, the military did so much more of that than we did and heavy equipment, and such as that. But we dropped quite a lot of heavy equipment and we were experimenting with the trenchers and things like that. Some of them weight 500 or 600 pounds. And we dropped those, and we dropped chain saws, and such as that but, but that's just about a standard operation anymore that, all this equipment that they drop now.

KM What did you use, two chutes or something on a trencher?

FL No, we only used one but we usually had a, maybe a 35 foot canopy or something like that, then there were parts of the trencher that would come off and we'd drop it in a separate bundle or something like that. But at 500 pounds it didn't land too hard anyway and it was a big chunk of steel is what it was.

KM Yeah.

FL The engine and a track and handle bars and things like that on it. Those were some of things then that, that didn't seem to work out, people wouldn't accept them. They figured if they couldn't do it with a grub hoe or a shovel, why... but some of the things that we used are, did work out real well if they would have, would have used them, trenchers and things like that but... just hard to sell I guess.

KM That's right, yeah. What were some of the other earlier things that you had or ideas that didn't pan out?

FL Well just off-hand I just can't remember. We worked with so many different things and... and, uh... no I can't remember just right off hand. I... take some time to think about it, I guess.
Sure, how about um, as you got going, what kind of training did you start developing for the new jumpers?

Well we did that pretty much uh, when we all went to Missoula. We pretty much agreed. The first year or two we didn't even keep out training plans from the year before you know. Just throw them away and make up new ones and we got, finally got wise and said, well we ought to keep these. And from then on, why, there was a lot of it that was taken probably from the smokechaser training and things like that where they have these guard schools that... I was an instructor at the guard schools, teaching compass, and pacing, and fire fighting, and different things like that. And we taught the jumpers the same thing, same type of fire fighting. But we soon developed a, a lot more of the... refined a little bit, and now I think the ground people probably use the smoke jumper training plans pretty much. Even the physical... and that's something else that was developed through the years was the physical training that we picked up from... well, when I was in Missoula why we had a fellow there from the University of Montana, was a football player, and he brought two or three of his things in there that they trained him physically. I think some of those are used still today only different types of material and different methods probably but.... The physical training settled all down and they, they even had a doctor over there that jumped from Missoula and he helped developed quite a few of the training plans and things that were good for the type of... the landing zone, and your back injuries and things like that could be prevented. So, all that just built up for several years and then we, we got so we had these Regional meetings that this Region would meet with Missoula and Region Four and we got to agreeing on these things. Then pretty soon the people in Washington, especially, decided, "Well, no reason why you guys shouldn't use all the same equipment and have the same training plans and do things the same way." Which we did. If somebody started developing something, why, he might work on it a little bit but he was supposed to send it to Missoula then to be approved and sent back, probably, for experimental work on it or something like that. But, it was pretty well agreed then that all these training plans would be standardized and the equipment all standardized, because we were getting more and more wherever we were changing people. And people from here go over to there and if their equipment didn't get back off a fire, why they could go ahead and use the equipment where they working and be the same as they were used to here. Eliminate accidents and, and just make it easier on the jumpers.

So that, that did develop?

Yes, and as far as I know today why it's all very much standardized. That was one reason why we got into the the harness that was completely adjustable to take the full size. At one time an extremely big man or extremely small man couldn't get a harness to fit him or suits or anything like that either you know?
But they all had their own equipment like they... like now?

Yeah they usually, they start out with their own equipment. Well even like here we always had spare equipment and spare parachutes and things like that, so... Because many times they'd have to leave it out there and they'd pick it up later with a helicopter, or a packer from off the forest would take it out to his end of the trail and we'd have to pick it up there later, or they'd send it back on a truck, or by airplane, or... But it got so pretty much that we quit depending on packers here and, and we kept... started working on lightning our equipment so that the jumpers that... they didn't come back unless they had their equipment with them. And, it worked out very well and we got so that we... seemed to me, we got more fires out of it and people... as long as they didn't have to send packers out and fool around and things like that, that, that they, just like that.

You got back quicker.

Yes, and then get into the helicopters which made it easier too.

Yeah.

But a lot of times the pack strings would be busy and they couldn't get people to pack them out and maybe your equipment would lay over on the trail for two or three weeks or something like that. People would high grade it and steal things out of it.

Yeah.

So the fellows, they just got, went into light chain saws as much as we could and things like that. Even came to the... too rough, why they could leave a pulaski or shovel or something out there and bury it or get rid of it. Or they could bring it out to a trail and leave it. My own son jumped on a fire over here on Lake Chelan one time and he came in from the Siskew and their, the pack that they dropped their equipment on, the parachute failed and they just smashed everything up, and he said he went over there and looked at it and happened to look over by a tree and that wasn't over 50 feet away and here was a pulaski and a shovel leaning up against a tree that, there had been a fire in there close a year or two before and the jumpers had just leaned them up against a tree and there they were. Of course, you don't run into that very often.

No. Well... what was the process in a fire called, the beginning of jumping?

Well, it was a pretty slow situation that... I received a lot of my fire calls at home, then I would have to go down and wake up the pilot and go wake up some jumpers and we'd...
KM And they'd be living here?

FL Well the first few years, the pilot stayed in town at the hotel, and the jumpers, part of them that... on the first year we had a, some buildings at Twisp which is downhill, opposite direction of here, about four and a half miles and I'd have to go down there and get the jumpers out and get them up. Then I'd bring them up here and pilot would be here by that time and... but meanwhile I'd have gotten all of the information and so we'd just get in and take off.

KM Yeah.

FL But for years here then for the rest of the day if we were up, we had a telephone line in here with party lines, there was 18 different farmers and people on the line with us, so you know, what the chance during the day they you would have getting line, but...

KM Yeah.

FL After dark usually and during the night and early in the morning, why then but... After we got into a fire bust, people seemed to, they'd just back off of their private calls and turn it over to us, pretty much. Then through the years, well, of course, we got fancy enough trip to private line, you know. Nineteen-seventy I don't know, where it was probably close to 200 different lines that came in here, to handle the bust that we had here at that time. I was just talking to a telephone man the other day and he was telling me all the things that he went through. The main telephone line ran down the other side of the river and he brought a cable across and had it all hooked up over here, because there were so many fire bosses and so many activities going on here that each one wanted a private line and they got it.

KM Oh really?

FL Cause we actually had our own weather station out here and then the FAA were... they came in and helped us out, by taking all the aircraft radio work from us, but they also had horrible line and everything out there on the runway. Then we had 50 some helicopters across the way here and had an office over there, mobile office and things like that, with several different lines in there and cause each operator, they wanted a line so they could get repairs and, and things like that. Then each, each fireman wanted a phone and there were just phones everyplace over here. Also, signing people in there, because there was over 5,000 people went through here in just a day or two.

KM That's amazing.

FL Getting them signed through and signed out, and things like that. But there was sure, just that difference in the... over all those years.
KM Yeah. What... who would call you for the fire call?

FL Well, originally it started out that the Forest Supervisor would call me, or his representative usually a fire staff man. But, over the years, then we developed what we called kind of an automatic dispatch out of here that we'd have enough radio communications in the area and then I had radio communications for this side of the forest and also for the other side, that I could intercept the reports from lookouts, and things like that. That as soon as I'd hear a report why, I had the permission of that Ranger just verbally, to load and go. And we'd get out there with a fire, why, then usually the radio in the airplane, the squad leader would contact them, tell them what they had and, and that was it. There just... and many times that it got so that, then, that I was almost a Forest Dispatcher here, too. And so they'd just call back here and I'd tell them, "Well, put them on there." Then you go tell them what they did and so as soon as they, they'd man the fire and then they'd go in and tell them. And of course, the quicker you put one of those things out, why the quicker you had your people back you know.

KM Right.

FL They didn't get a chance to burn in. Too many times our big fires and our most dangerous fire were caused by sleepers that had laid over and people couldn't find them. And so we were out here flying, right at daylight, and we also developed the flying with the people on board ready to jump. To patrol with them and things like that on these fire busts.

KM Chasing the clouds and...?

FL Yeah and they even have their, the contacts of the Districts and also with the, the patrol planes, and such as that. Normally, when I was dispatching here or whoever, would... we listened to all this anyway and if there was any confusion, why, you could get it straightened out right away. Then they'd know here how many people you had left, and actually, it was working real good. But I don't know, they got into a lot of fancy methods that now I guess, that... but...

KM Yeah. So during the day the jumpers would be here working on projects?

FL Yes.

KM And then just like usual, then, a siren would go off or something?

FL Normally we would keep enough people here... see, before I left we had up as high as probably 45, almost 50, qualified jumping people here. The people down on the tail end of the list, as long as the weather was right, would usually be out here on project work or, something out... well, maybe up the Washington Pass and all around on the Districts, and things like
that. Recreation work. Not only... they'd get the work done but... for the Districts, but they were keeping in shape and keeping the morale up somewhat and getting a job done for the tax payer.

KM Yeah.

FL But then I would keep at least two aircraft loads here or maybe one, you know. But I'd have people strung out there to where I could get them back in here by the time the airplane would get back. But then they started getting a bust, why then, we'd just keep the whole works in because the District, they'd be busy,, too, and they didn't want to be fooling around with, but...

KM Yeah.

FL Then these people that get on the fires and get back off of them quicker, so...

KM Mmm mmm, what do you know of the uh, a death of one of the black battalion jumpers in 1945? Maybe it was up on Bunker Hill?

FL No it wasn't on Bunker Hill, I can't remember any deaths. They had one hung up for quite a while over on the Mount Baker. In fact there's a couple of parachutes hung over there yet I think.

KM Oh really?

FL Yeah.

KM Still there?

FL On that, but I don't remember any uh, anybody dying.

KM No?

FL No.

KM OK.

FL The only thing that would kill them, would they'd be scared to death, but...

KM Right.

FL Because uh, in fact I put the first jumper, black jumpers on Bunker Hill.

KM Oh?

FL And we put 97 of them on there, and... little while, because I'd all ready had put ten smokejumpers on there and they were to go down and meet the, uh... these black paratroopers and get them
lined out. And they actually acted as the foremen on there, then, for them. But they were good as long as they was digging fire line and putting the fire under control, but when it came to the mop up work, why they were ready to come home. But there, they kind of planned on a five, ten percent injuries and they actually got it too.

KM Why its that, they just...?

FL Well I don't know, a lot of it I think was fear in those fellows. Because uh, they had a big meadow to jump into, and there was no reason. But, one of the things, those pilots, they didn't care much for those black paratroopers and they would hold their speed way high, because we were going right around a mountain there just like that, and they were doing 130 knots. Those fellows would go out of there and those chutes would stream open and it would just tear their, their litter bags off of them and jerk their helmets off and, and a lot of them would have two chutes open and things like that, you know. And then of course, they was scared. It was high country and on one side of this mountain there was a lot of snow banks, and for some reason that just scared them half to death. I don't know why, but, uh... they were, uh... 505 I think was the, 505 Battalion or something like that. [55th--ed.]

KM Yeah.

FL But we started out with 100 of them and we got 97 of them on the fire.

KM Hmm, the other ones were injured?

FL No, they was caught under the seat or something, they was... got sick or something. But... but anyway, we had probably the highest number of men ever jumped on one fire then and that was clear back in 1945.

KM Yeah.

FL But they jumped afterward on two or three different fires. In fact, I jumped two airplane loads of them on a fire just across, on the Canadian, almost on the Canadian side. On, uh... well, later on that summer. But they were still pretty much... military, you know. They wanted to do things military ways, even uh, even if it was wrong. Like, they were trained to jump going into the wind and that's the only way they could go to one. And, when I'd put my smokejumpers on that same fire, put ten of them on that fire too, I put them lengthwise and sideways to the wind and let them drift into the, openest place and all ten of them on at once. And I pushed the cargo out the same way. But these fellows, I came in and I asked them if they wanted me to help them and, "No." Then they went right across, and every one of them. their jumpers, they'd put them into the timber and they had camouflage suits and you couldn't see where they were.
FL Besides the smoke and things like that. And then they dropped a cargo free fall and they just smashed all pieces, their rations and their sleeping bags would bounce, among those they didn't throw over the mountain. But over on the Bunker Hill, we made two or three passes around there, and a lieutenant was spotting them and he became so confused that he didn't know where he was. And he'd put two bundles of these cargo out clear over in the timber on the opposite side of the mountain.

FL And so I asked if I could help him then and he very obligingly backed off and said, "You do it", and so the next pass around why I put out half that load and George Honey down there, he was in the second airplane then, and they put their bunch out. Then there was two airplanes behind us then I think and they put theirs all out in the same place then so we unloaded them there and nothing flapped, and they got to going once but...

KM Oh no!

FL But uh, that was a lieutenant, and then there was a sergeant that was flying in there on the Heather Creek fire, and so they... but he was kind of hard headed and he said he was going to do it, so... but that's... he really fouled up.

KM Yeah. Did you um, have many injuries or... of jumpers in this area when you...?

FL No, I think we had more injuries on these fellows getting back and forth to work, or after hours, than anything. One of them run his motorcycle into an aspen patch up here, coming to work one morning, and broke his arm, and things like that. But, our injuries, I think we had probably one of the better safety records than all the other regions put together.

KM Oh really?

FL And it was uh, a lot of the training in the squad leaders and things like, that... The thing is that, my background here, and I'd covered so much of this country that I knew what it was and walked over it. But a lot of those fellow over there had the same opportunities, too, but when it came to spotting jumpers, why, there seems to be a little more knack to it, or something, and getting the confidence of these fellows and...

KM Mmm mmm.

FL But we had accidents where they'd hit the side of their foot on a rock or something like that. But we really never did have any bad ones.

KM Hmm, did you, you did do quite a few rescue jumps though I
FL Yes, yeah.

KM Were they mostly hikers and hunters, and that kind of thing?

FL Yeah. People would go back there and either get lost or else they'd hurt themselves, or something like that.

KM Yeah, do you remember any particular ones?

FL No, not particularly. Well, I think probably the worst one we had, and he was a Forest Service employee and lives up here in town now, and uh, he was back to the Hidden Lakes and picked up a box of old dynamite caps and was going to go out and throw them away or something and he was headed out and they just went off and blewed his hand off right here. And that was just before getting close to dark, so I jumped Bill Moody, and uh... 'cause he had a lot of first-aid training, at that time. And a couple of other fellows in there and they went in and, and there happened to be a nurse there. But they had took quite a lot of first-aid equipment with them between him and the nurse, why, they kept him from bleeding to death and kept him there all night, and kept the... wasn't so much shock and then they cut out enough helicopter spot there at the end of one of the lakes so they could get him out in the morning and brought him out of here and then...

KM Yeah.

FL So, that's probably one of the worst ones, outside of one or two that was already dead, I think, that had... one of them slid down a mountain over here on a snow slide or something and banged into the rocks and beat her all up.

KM How about, um... what was I going to say? Let's see... Oh! How about, uh... malfunctions?

FL Well, let's see uh, I guess I had about the first malfunction.

KM Oh yeah?

FL It was on my third jump and they were supposed to...

KM Third jump ever?

FL Yeah. Third. It was actually a training jump and then we were supposed to come back across from the river here and land over on this side of the airport, on the East side of the airport. But I got out right over the highway over there and everything just going normal and, and, uh... at that time we were counting to three for the rip cord and I made my three count, pulled the rip cord. And I'd... I always jumped with my eyes opened so I knew what was going on and I was going down backwards
and I'd look up here and here's my, my right foot up there, well both feet was up there and there was a pilot chute wrapped around my right foot.

KM Oh no.

FL And it was just going like that there, you know. And I remember looking right down at the, at the road then, the highway over there, and I could see the stripe down the highway and I could see I lost altitude so I started to reach for my rip cord on the, the other chute because I'd been taught to throw it out to the side, you know. And uh... those Eagle parachutes and I just grabbed a hold of the rip cord like that and evidently that snapped off of there or something but it turned me over like that and the backpack opened just bang like that and then it pulled my hand with the rip cord in it, too. So it slithered out down past my feet and here I was, I had to come across the river and the wind wasn't too... too good and uh, so I just let that get inflated, my emergency. I gathered it up and I was trying to hold it in my legs here, wrapped around it. It'd keep slithering out and start to inflate and I'd pull it back but I couldn't get my parachute around and get it turned, and when I did why I see, didn't think I could make it across the river, and so I got turned around and back out into an alfalfa field over there, I could see, well, I was coming close to a, pretty close to a main ditch down through there and I didn't want to land in that so I got pulled off to the side and got my canopy pulled back up there again out... so it didn't come up around me, and there was a irrigator, farmer walking right down the side of that ditch, and he didn't know there was anybody within 100 miles of him and... walking along there with his shovel over his shoulder and I come zipping right under there just like that with that parachute and all that stuff. And happened to be, there was about, oh, maybe a foot of water out there in the alfalfa where he'd turned it out in there the night before. And I went in there on my belly and scooped that down my neck and it scared him about half to death. He was about ready to hit me with that shovel. [laugh] Then I got up out of there and then they invited me over to that place for breakfast, and... but Frank Derry, they saw that, that canopy or that pilot chute hooked up on my foot and so he figured I'd be scared to death or something but it didn't bother me one bit, because I knew what was going on, I knew I had the other parachute and the whole shabang but I didn't plan on that thing flying off like it did. I could see it wrapped around there just as plain as day and that's what pulled me head down.

KM You didn't land head down?

FL Oh no, I landed up right all right.

KM Yeah.

FL Other than I went down uh, landed going ahead and went down on my stomach and scooped up a lot of water up my neck, but uh... But it they, I got back in, they sent a truck right over and
picked me up. So he wanted to know if I was scared or anything and I told him no, and so I'm going right back up and jumped again, but he said that's what you had to do. But it didn't bother me that much cause I knew right what was going on. And they wanted to know how come I hadn't got that other chute opened. I told them well I was, saw where I was and what was going on and they were surprised that I had kept my eyes open because too many people jump with their eyes closed.

KM Yeah.

FL But, I told them I saw that fluttering there and I thought I better get to doing something.

KM Yeah right, hmm.

FL But then we had one or two other malfunctions and those were with Eagles. But, by the way, they cut our count down to two then, instead of counting to three, because what was going on, we'd go out and then we'd start turning end over end on a three count and so he said, cut back to two, which I did and from then on... or all of us did. But we did have one with a static line right up over there [inaudible] time, it was just a streamer, but it opened by itself too. It, uh... well, what happened, it went out and it just fluttered up like that and kind of wrapped itself up. And those silk chutes, they charge up with a lot of static and stick together pretty good. But there were so many openings around these, around the skirt of these, uh... Eagles that they'd gather air anyway and you had to go maybe 100, 150 feet till it just popped open and so, he didn't even get his emergency opened. Other than that, I've... we've seen line overs and things like that, but that was about the only streamers that I'd ever seen.

KM Mmm mmm, and he just didn't deploy, pull the rip cord or the static line, just nothing opened? Ever seen one...?

FL Pardon?

KM [Have] you ever seen one where nothing...?

FL Yeah we had one of those and that was, uh... fellow just forgot to hook up.

KM Oh.

FL Yeah, they went out the door. Well there was two of them, excuse me. One of them forgot to hook up and he went out the door with the snap in his hand and he finally came due and then uh, then another one, I just happened to look as I, as he went out the door and I saw that snap come down there and just snap right off of the cable.

KM The cable busted?

FL No, it didn't break.
KM The snap busted?
FL The snap just snapped off of it.
KM Oh.
FL He had it snapped on there. Well what happened, the fellow went on ahead of him then it pulled down and snapped back so hard that it just snapped that snap right open.
KM Oh.

FL But it also snapped it off there just as he went out the door. But he got his opened. But I guess we had one other kind of a malfunction out here one time when one of the jumpers went out and got his arm over the static line and it held the apex of the parachute in for a little bit, but... when it bloomed out there and then it just finally took it away from him.
KM Hurt his...?
FL But his arm was over there like that you see and he had the apex of the parachute around one arm here. But it, it just took it away from him.
KM Hmm, so how long did you have pilot chutes?
FL Well all the time when we jumped with the rip cords.
KM And then after that just...?
FL Well after that they was all static line and they were pulled out and, and it broke loose of the, just tie cord.
KM Yeah. Oh, how about the people that you had coming through here the, the jumpers as they came through? What kind of changes did you see?
FL Well really I don't, I never seen any changes in... you mean the type of people or personalities?
KM Yeah, what kind of personalities.
FL Well I think they're all just about the same.
KM Oh Yeah?
FL No, there uh, I don't know, they were uh, always seemed to be, of course they're all young and energetic. But I never did, outside in all my career, I don't think I ever fired over one or two.
KM Oh Yeah?
FL And there was always that, that uh, you could help them with
or somewhere bring the kinks out. Or else, they had so much uh, well, one of my old bosses called it esprit de corp on the outfit that, that if one man wasn't making it, why the rest of them kind of took him under his wing. And I really didn't have to worry too much about them because they... We had one boy here at one time and he made one or two jumps and just said he couldn't take it anymore but, and he went home, he lived here in town but the guys went, talked to him and he come back and finished his jumping I don't know how many years he jumped up in Alaska, after that, you know.

KM Oh yeah? Huh.

FL Uh, only had one that ever backed out.

KM Of a, of a jump?

FL Yeah, on the first jump and he just went to the door and come back and said that was it.

KM Said he wasn't going to go huh?

FL Yeah. So...

KM Huh, well, pretty good record.

FL Yeah, I thought it was and... but you see, after they go through about 168 hours of training which they go through now, and soon build up to that, and those guys training and training and training and getting along with each other and, and it just be pretty hard for them just to up and back out or anything like that.

KM Mmm mmm.

FL There was a few that only jumped one year and I'm pretty sure that they stuck it out a year just because of... of the rest of the crew, or something like that. I was pretty sure that they didn't like it.

KM Yeah, huh, what kind of uh, affect did you see that the war or the Vietnam War had on the jumping?

FL Oh I couldn't see any difference, any affect on it. People that came back, there was two or three of them came back was quite bitter about the war over there all right you know and of course there was so many of them that way that...

KM The Vietnam War or World War Two?

FL Oh, Vietnam, Vietnam War. But a lot of these fellows that came to me after World War One [sic] that, in fact a couple of them just retired down here from the Redmond outfit here a year or two ago, three or four years ago yeah that, that came here and worked all the way with me, the squad leaders and then went out
and took over other outfits. The thing is that all through the years there are these fellows that are, went out of here that I know of that went out on the Ranger Districts and Forest Supervisors' offices, especially in Fire Control that ended up retiring there that, after they put in there several years of jumping.

KM Yeah.

FL But for several years, see we had a limit on the age and the weights and things like that and then they had to pass these physicals and, and things like that. But I always encouraged these guys and I tried to give them as much training as I could that, well they could go out and take one of these jobs because I didn't think they wanted to spend all their life on, in something like this because it... there just wasn't that much room for uh, advancement.

KM Right.

FL And now one of them, of course he's a college man, is an administrator up in Fairbanks, Alaska for all the BLM in that whole Alaska Region. And his brother is in charge of all the fire on, around the Anchorage area. In fact, he's retiring this month I think up there, K. Johnson, and I've got several others around and one is a Regional Dispatcher, I think down at, in Portland and another or two down in Oregon that are Dispatchers and fire people on districts. They had no problem at all of going into good jobs when they were ready. Two or three over here on the Okanogan too I think and around. That was thing, like on these timber inventories and cruising and things like that and, and then we met lots of people out on fires and, and had a chance to show their stuff and they had good exposure. So many of them, that they didn't have a problem getting a better job or transferring from smokejumping to another position of some kind.

KM Do you remember many stories that people had as they came back from fires or people that you jumped with or...?

FL Well, I really don't uh, I never did pay too much attention to their stories because, well you figured some of them was stretched a little bit anyway. And they never really did come around and tell me their stories because they figured I probably wouldn't believe them anyway. I know smokejumpers had lots of stories and, uh... but other than that... get back to those malfunctions and I remember one which is a good story and the fellow made one jump and quit. But that was over in Region-1 and I think that was the second year I was over there. We were jumping there from Nine Mile but, and he was one of them that well, in fact, he was the guy that didn't even hook up when he went out.

KM Oh.
FL And uh, he finally got his other chute open and he got into the, there was a creek running right along side the airport, big high willows in it, and he came into that, after he got his chute open and, and so help me, come down into the willow trees and he hooked his foot in a crotch in the trees like that and it hung him upside down. He couldn't get out of there. Then to add to that, the guys went over there and they were excited and what'd they do, they just chopped the tree off like that and he went right down on his head and right into the creek. And he got up out of there and that night he paced back and forth in the bathhouse all night long. The next morning, why, he just quit.

KM Oh Yeah?

FL Yeah. But there was quite a coincidence. All those things happened to him at the same time you know.

KM Yeah, guess he figured...

FL Started out with himself, that he'd forgotten to hook up.

KM Yeah, well let's see here, um, oh. Do you know of any fires themselves that were either difficult or significant in some way, or that were... that made a close call for any jumpers?

FL Well we've had two or three around here. In fact we had fellow up here that burned his feet, landed in the fire.

KM Oh he landed in the fire?

FL Yes, but I think that, probably, he was excited because none of the other jumpers got into the fire you see and I think he got excited or turned around or didn't do the job he was supposed to. But he got into the fire hot enough that it uh, didn't burn his shoes up or anything like that but it got so hot that it blistered his feet, and things like that. And then the Mann Gulch, Mann Gulch fire in Montana, It think that was about 1950 or '51 where there was about 15 of them that got into the fire over there and most of those, in fact all of them I think, probably ran themselves to death. Because I had the opportunity to go over there on the investigation as a smokejumper representative, and... but they took off in that heavy smoke and running and things like that and the fellow that... one or two fellows that got out of it, two or three I guess it was, but, they stopped there in one little place and, and set the place afire and dug a little hole so they could get their face in the ground and they made it fine. There was two or three little black spots on their shirts where the sparks landed on them but other than that, the other fellows they was found all strung out and things like that and up against the bluff, where they were badly burned.

KM Hmm, they didn't set back fires?

FL No, they just got excited and ran. But this fellow that got,
kept two of them there with him, why, he was a kind of an old timer too. In fact I gave him his first training over there and jumped him on his first fire over here in, up at the head of Lake Chelan. He died several years later, I think kidney ailments or something. But they, they just excited you know and they wouldn't pay attention, just didn't listen or do what they were told.

KM Yeah.

FL But I think there was about a total of 15 of them or something like that.

KM And they were all out of Missoula weren't they?

FL Yes, yeah. Yeah, they'd know all about that over there, that Mann Gulch fire. They've got all the...

KM Right, huh.

FL Didn't you say you was from over there?

KM Yeah.

FL Yeah.

KM Is there anything that you would have changed, looking back on the beginning of...?

FL No I don't think so. I really enjoyed my career here as, see I had about 33 years in it.

KM Including uh, before jumping, ten years before.

FL Well no I had, I had actually about 42 fire seasons of... of actual fire experience. About 33 of those was right here off the airport or, as I say, I was either connected or worked over from Missoula or with them over there, So I spent a good many years over at Missoula too or a good, a lot of my time during my career over there with those fellows. And I knew, worked with nearly all of them and... but as far as my career in itself, I rarely enjoyed it. And, and I got in it right from the start. Actually before the start, I guess, with the working on the experiment. And then uh, helping along with development work and for many years they, well, they called us kind of a bastard outfit because we was just kind of working, you know, the Forest Service, but professional foresters and people like that and one of the Chiefs of the Forest Service or the Chief of Fire Control from Washington one time came out here to inspect us and he said, "Well you fellows will be out of business here within five years, the helicopters will take you over." But they never did, you know. But there was such things as that that, and we had to do a lot of public relations work over the years to actually demonstrate to people that we could do the job. And those were some of the reasons some of the development work we did here and
especially packing our own equipment out uh, being the least
nuisance that we could you know. Go out and do the job and get
home on our own. Those fellows appreciated that, especially when
they had heavy schedules, not only fire work, but their own work
to be done, and things like that that... A string of horses or
mules or people that go out and help these fellows come in, was
almost a nuisance to them. And I could see that a long time ago.
And we started up this pretty early here, to pack our own
equipment out, and go out there and do the job and get home on
our own with the least possible help. But there's always been
just a continual development. If there wasn't parachute
equipment to work on, there was always some type of trying to
development something that put fires out better.

KM Yeah.

FL And the reason I got went into the trenchers so heavy was
that we had got so much backcountry in here with so much old
burns and so much down timber and so much second growth coming up
through it that it's a terrible job to go in there and do all the...
cut all those logs and still build fire line. Some of the
rigs we had here that one or two men could build as much fire
line digging out the dirt, as 15 or 20 men could if they'd go
ahead and use the equipment but... And the way equipment
development is today, it, that stuff is so much more reliable now
than it was then, even. But we'd proven it quite a lot and then
we had a lot of those kind of rigs here that we'd worked with.
And you have to train people to use them just the same as
anything else, so I really enjoyed my whole career at it.

KM That's great.

FL And I think that the people I worked with why, they really
make it enjoyable, too. But I guess that it all starts out with
one person. You have to select your people first and then train
them and, such as that, and sell them your ideas, and so on. I'm
sure glad to see all these guys that, that uh, are making a
success of it. In fact I had a fellow call me up here the other
day from up in Fairbanks, Alaska and he's been up there, he went
through the jumpers here and now he's kind of working in... for
the fire control up there. But I guess they were sitting there
talking several of them one evening and they just got up, went
to the phone and called me up. And I bet he talked for an hour
and a half.

KM Oh Yeah?

FL As long as he was paying the bill, yeah and so many things
that he reminded me of that, that I had said to him and things
like that but, of course, I didn't remember it but he did. So
you run into things like that. In fact there was a Canadian
fellow dropped into see me here about ten days ago, jumped here
along the '50's or somewhere along there and he's back up in
Canada. In fact he married a local girl...
[END OF TAPE]
This is the second part of an interview with Francis Lufkin by Kim Maynard for the Smokejumpers Oral History Project in Winthrop, Washington on June 7, 1984. OH #133-62.

FL There's some people in San Francisco and they're putting it in the form of a book, I think, so...

KM Strickland, um...

FL He's in Seattle. Bill knows him and he's been here a few times, got information on jumping.

KM Okay.

FL He could make you a copy of it up, anyway.

KM Yeah, okay great, I'll take that. Let me just say that this is Francis Lufkin again. Um, okay first of all, what about the rescue units that were being trained in 1943 and '45 from the military, did you know much about that?

FL No, we didn't have anything to do with that here.

KM You didn't?

FL No, I think probably most of that military training was probably being done by Frank Derry as far as the parachute end of it and I think the military probably had their own medics and such as that. Normally at that time, why, Frank Derry was doing most of the parachute training with some of these other outfits.

KM Yeah. [interruption] I hope it'll stop. How 'bout any of the search and rescue, that also wasn't part of it?

FL No, not as far as we were concerned here. Now, if you have an opportunity to talk to Bill Wood because he was involved with that in Region One quite a lot when he was there. And as a jumper and later on as a foreman, too, they were trying to develop different methods of rescue, and such as that. They tried all different methods of transportation, and such as that. They usually worked with a doctor there from Missoula, I think, that they had trained to jump. And he taught them a lot of the rescue methods and especially the first aid and such as that.

KM Um, what do you know about the Japanese fire balloons?

FL Well, that was one of the main things during the war, that one... in fact it kept me out of the service, I guess, because they gave me a kind of a rating of some kind that I couldn't even quit my job, and that was on account of those Jap balloons and the fire business. And the same way with the young fellow down on the Siskiyou, because they were quite a threat and we patrolled everyday during the summer months for those and I know we reported different types of balloons, but the military always took care of them. They didn't even let us know what they were,
whether they were weather balloons or were the actual fire balloons, or just what. But they were somewhat completely over here and on into Montana and some of the only ones they know of here was one that landed down on one of the beaches in Oregon and the Sunday schoolteacher there with his Sunday school class was out on some kind of a field trip or something and they ran onto it and exploded it, and killed some of 'em, but... so there were two types of balloons really. There were the man-killer type, I guess you'd call 'em, then the fire-type, too, but the only thing that I ever saw was one we reported and the military sent a [inaudible]-type aircraft in and shot it down and we never did know what happened to it after that. They just didn't tell you and we had strict instructions that anything we found to leave it alone and stay away from it. So...

KM Yeah. What was the difference between the two types?

FL Well, one of 'em, when they landed, was, theoretically, to start a forest fire. And that's what they wanted to do as we understood it, this West Coast with all this heavy timber and... is to get a bunch of fire started and especially during the summertime and not only destroy the timber, but to keep the people busy, I guess. And so, evidently a lot of 'em didn't work or didn't get here or went clear on over, the things we did report we don't know what they were. So all we knew, we was doing the job and... besides fighting our own lightning fires and such as that, at the time.

KM How did that, that kept you out of the service because they wanted you to, to stay in or...?

FL Yeah, because it was in the fire, forest fire. And I couldn't even get on a jury or anything else like that. It was... you had just be right here. We had absolutely no time off all during the war, even during the wintertime. And in the wintertime, why, during the time we had these aerial warning service stations here on these lookout. Those were the people that were up there to report aircraft comin' in back and forth. And I serviced them and then I took a week's aircraft identification course over at the University of Washington, same as they gave the military, and then I came back and I'd go to these different stations and teach those people because they were supposedly to report the type of aircraft whether it was United States or whether it was Japanese or whatever.

KM So they were using fire lookout towers?

FL Yeah, and then they did have some ground service stations like up here at War Creek. There was a guard station there which is right down on the main road, but it was snowed in in the wintertime. But they had a man and wife there, they had man and wife teams around on these different lookouts. Some of them they even built a little house up there for 'em, a living room and kitchen and bath, or a bedroom, and such as that. Of course they had to get out and carry their own water and things like that,
but they supplied those pretty well in the fall and then during
the winter months, why, at least once a month, I would make a
trip to each one of these, take their mail and fresh supplies and
things like that. And that was usually all snow shoe and I'd
carry it on my back in just a pack. Oh, income tax time, I made
out their income tax form then too, and things like that. Of
course, at that time, just a little card for each one of 'em.
Pretty simple then. So it was a rather interesting, year round
work at, it and then in addition to that I had to keep the
communications up to each one of 'em, too. They had telephone
lines up, they did have some type of radio, but at that time,
they just weren't too dependable, you know, to be there all
winter. And they... they were rather massive sets and they had a
massive set of batteries to go with 'em and things like that. So
it was quite a little chore to keep 'em going here in this area,
anyway.

KM Do you ever jump into them in the summer with supplies?

FL No, no we used to drop quite a few supplies to different
lookouts. Especially here in the back country in the Paseyten
area. But it got so that, more and more we dropped, even begin
dropping water to 'em and things like that, where especially
during a spell of high fire hazard. They wanted them right on
there all twenty-four hours a day, why, we either drop water to
'em. More and more we got into helicopters and take water into
'em and things like that. All during that time, too, when the
lookout went up, why he was there all summer long, twenty-four
hours a day, seven days a week, he went out and stayed and he
didn't come in till the fire season was over. Unless he was a
college man or a college woman, then they would replace them with
someone else, the locals who could go up there and stay the rest
of the season. So those have all changed, too, and where we used
to have twenty-five or thirty lookouts around this area well,
there's only two or three now to go along with the aerial fire
patrol.

KM What about uh, first years of jumping the OR, uh, at least
once it started going, what about the living quarters around
here?

FL Well, our first living quarters around here of course, was
some old CCC buildings and they were at Twisp. And, of course,
the first year in 1940 we stayed at home because all of us were
local here, except Buss Gary and Glenn Smith, and they stayed in
a, kind of a room up here at the Ranger Station at Winthrop. And
the warehouse there at Winthrop was the... had a long warehouse
so that they could pack parachutes in there. Then after that,
when they got conscientious objectors who came back, we used
some old CCC buildings at Twisp, right in town. They had two
or three old portable buildings put up in there and then the
original Ranger Station was still there at that time, and the
house itself. So we used that for a cookhouse and we had a
local woman here from Winthrop that did the cooking. And at that
time, too, that summer, that was in 1945 and we started
experimenting with hot food. And we were using a five gallon tin can similar to what they use at that time to carry kerosene and gasoline and things like that in, only they did have the ground lids in 'em and the cooks would cook up the various types of food and we had some round cardboard locker... freezer locker containers, and the cooks would put the food in each one of those and label 'em and then they put 'em all inside these tin cans and then we'd wrap paper and stuff around the outside, just to keep 'em warm or keep 'em hot. And that worked very well, it was a rather extensive job to feed a bunch of men in that way, but it could be done and they really were satisfied with it. Especially in comparison with the rations of that time. From there on, why, we did a lot of that work out of here and then we'd begin to get in a surplus [of] hot food containers from the military and things like that. Especially after the war began to simmer down, and all kinds of things like that. And we could just drop, fix up twenty-five to fifty men pretty quick and the cooks did it all there in the cookhouse. And so, then along after that, started to getting these frozen meals in. And we even heated those for a few times where they didn't have facilities or they wanted 'em real quick. And we could just heat those and just leave them in their containers and drop 'em to 'em. All they had to do was open 'em then and put them out into a dish of some kind. But they would soon get their own camp set up and they could just heat 'em up out there. Sometimes they were far enough back why, we'd just drop a bunch of frozen meals to 'em, and then they could go ahead and heat them themselves. Usually in boiling water. I think, I don't know whether they still have 'em or not, I guess they do.

KM How did they drop the water?

FL Oh, just in cans, five gallon cans. Then a lot of places why, they'd have their own water, you know, where they'd set up a camp, along the creek or something like that. But you always dropped their sleeping bags into 'em, and fire tools, and things like that.

KM Must have been quite a pack out when they [inaudible]?

FL Well, yeah, after that, they either carried it out by helicopter or nearly always they had pack strings going back and forth. And they'd pack a certain amount of stuff in, and then they'd usually go in and pack the supplies out, and such as that. We had two or three fires that were way up in the Pinnacles, in fact, one of 'em was a Pinnacle fire. I think that was about 1951, and the people all walked in there and they had to go up through the crags just like goats and we dropped all their supplies to 'em, tools and all, and the whole thing. Then kept 'em supplied up there with hot food, three times a day. And then after the fire was over, they didn't have anybody up there to wrestle those sleeping bags down over the cliffs, so they sent three jumpers in there, and they'd bundle 'em up and get 'em over the edge of the cliff and kick 'em off over the side and get 'em down to where the mules could pick 'em up and bring 'em on up
that way.

KM So they didn't do their own cooking?

FL No, they had a lower camp on that particular fire, all right, but we dropped supplies into it. But it was right down on the, on the Lost River. Where they had their own water and a flat place to camp. Those fellows up on the ridge, there was just no way to get back and forth, there was only one or two ways in there. It's steep and bluffy. So they found places up there where they could put a sleeping bag, or dig it out so they could, and stay right there.

KM Do you ever jump in for project work?

FL Oh yeah, did quite a lot of that and especially on trail maintenance in the spring. And, as I said before, we did some on some timber inventory and then we had a lookout, build a lookout on Bloker hill. We dropped the whole thing in there and then we dropped some jumpers in and they built the lookout. The helicopter, I guess... I think, yeah, the helicopter got 'em off there then, so they didn't have to walk out. We did various other things like that, whether they were building lookouts and maybe they need some help in there for a day or two to raise part of the tower, or something like that, so we'd drop some jumpers in there. Usually a four-man load, or something like that, stay right there and help 'em. And the same thing, we did some on bridges, too. We dropped complete bridges back here in some of the Paseyten country, portable steel bridges and things like that.

KM Foot bridges?

FL Yes, well, they were for pack stock as well. But they were primarily a trail bridge. They were pretty good size, a lot of those and very big chunks of steel, but always get 'em in the airplane, you could get 'em out. The only thing you had to make sure that they were covered real well and, and that the parachutes were gonna open because if they bent or anything like that, you see, they didn't fit and they were a portable bridge is what they were and...

KM What kind of chute did you use on...?

FL We used surplus military canopies.

KM Just one chute per [inaudible]?

FL Usually, yes. We very seldom ever used more than one chute. We got some pretty good sized, we got 35 and maybe a 50 foot chute once in awhile or something like that, but, normally we had to keep that stuff down to where one man could just about handle it. Because by the time we got an airplane load and especially those Beeches and Norseman, and things like that, there wasn't room enough for two people to work back there and still carry a
load. Then you got everything back in the back end and that wasn't good either, you know. So we kept the loads down to where usually one man could handle 'em and could move 'em around and get 'em out the door, you know. We did quite a lot of seeding, too, at times, on some of the old burns. In the fall, we'd go in and seed.

KM By air?

FL Yes, right from the airplane, just made a box fit in the door, especially on that old Norseman, and piece of stovepipe went out the side and a board up in front of it so we could shut it off and pour it full of grass seed. We didn't have any markers at the time, but we really got good jobs on it, it seemed like, it came up good and even and so a lot of things we did there that saved a lot of time going in and, it was probably some of the first seeding that was done on the fire's, as far as I know.

KM Yeah. That was after a forest fire?

FL Yes, especially the larger ones. And for some time there, a lot of times we'd carry a little seed with the jumpers so they had enough burn, why they'd just scatter them around there, and you know. It was... seed was compatible to this high altitude and things like that. And we did some of the first kind of retardant-dropping here, too. Of course, we had... see, that was in 1940, and Johnsons were in here with a Ford Tri-motor and we had a little fire right back over here in the, kind of in the sagebrush, and they wanted to give it a try. We just filled some milk cans, ten gallon milk cans full of water, and I don't know whether they had forty or fifty gallons there anyway. And come over to the fire and that old Ford, it was just like a big kite settling down over it and you actually get the people on the ground wet, you know. Just dump it out on that ten gallon can, two of us get in the back end and we dumped twenty gallons at a time. And that was kind of the start of some of that retardant, and so... it was quite interesting.

KM Did you, how'd you coordinate with the pilot?

FL Well, he'd, the pilot at that time, usually did all the... like the Johnson brothers, they'd dropped so much cargo on a [inaudible] in Travelaires and Fords, especially, why they could slow 'em right down. They just had a hand signal that they'd just get their hand up here above their right shoulder and drop it when they wanted to come in over the spot cuz usually like milk cans and things like that, you couldn't see out the door anyway. But we developed it especially with the Norseman and especially with the newer pilots that had never dropped cargo before, why, if we could guide 'em in the similar to the way we guided jumpers in. And soon after, he'd got on to, why, he'd go ahead and signal, too. That way a cargo dropper didn't have to have cargo part way out the door and his head out there, too, to see. But, there was a lot of coordination. Working together and
of course, the Johnson brothers had dropped cargo before over in the Montana area before we had some over here. I got to work with them quite a lot and then the same, see, the first years we used their airplanes over here, as well. They would come over with their airplanes and like in 1940, and around '41, too. George Honey and I were over there, why, they'd bring a squad over here and we'd work right out of this airport then. And the same way after that, that, then when they got into the conscientious objectors, why they'd bring 'em in here at this airport and then I'd work with them out here. [inaudible] cargo and thought I'd be working pretty near 24 hours a day, dispatching up there part of the time and coming down here and working at the airport and training people here to cargo. And goin' and dropping cargo. At that time, a rest period didn't mean anything. Many's the day I went into a fire, I'd work as high as 72 hours without ever stopping to sleep or anything like that. That gets to be dangerous, you get so rum-dum that you can't think or see. You just get so tired that... my wife still tells a story, I come home on this one trip and I'd been droppin' cargo all day long and I think that was after we got back into the jumpers. But anyway, I'd been droppin' cargo all day long and I went home and went to bed and she said I'd been in there about an hour or so and she heard me say, "Is this the cargo, and I grabbed a hold of her and dump her out of bed, [laughs] she woke me up. But anyway, that's about the way you work, anyway. And then for quite a few years here, the, back here they were quite apprehensive about the jumping yet. Like in the Regional offices and the Supervisor's office and such as that. So they didn't want anyone else doing any spotting or dropping or anything like that, you know, it had to be the old man here. Of course, we didn't have big enough crews at that time, fifteen man crews, but as the summer wore on, well, I got to training people anyway, you know. And find people who were really interested, and had them go along and spot jumpers and things like that. Then they finally agreed to it back in the Supervisor's office, well, they had people out here that could... [INTERUPTION] Turn it off?

KM  I just turned it back on?

FL  Well, anyway it gradually branched out from there. And then when we'd go to Montana that was one of the reasons over there that they had another fellow come in from McCall and I'd come in from here, and one from Cave Junction, all get together and do training over there. It seemed to be, take quite awhile before they would accept, that is the overhead people, would accept others into the organization that could do the job, you know. So we were being the instructors then and get along with the...

KM  Do you remember some of the other people who started out with the training?

FL  Over there?
KM Yeah.

FL Yeah, there was people like Earl Cooley and Bill Wood, who's now retired. And a fellow by the name of Fred Brauer and there was a fellow by the name of Johnny Johnson from McCall. And at one time Merle Lundrigan was both at Missoula and then right after the war he operated out of the Cave Junction Base for awhile. Then there was a Jack, oh, I can't think of his last name now, but he was also in the same boat as I when it came to going into the military, in fact, he was just a prime candidate for military, but they wouldn't take him on account of these fires. Anyway, he'd go over there, Jack Heinselman was his name, Heinselman. Yeah. And he'd go over there and we'd all make up our training plans and usually instruct so many different subjects and like that. We finally got to keeping those training plans and building 'em up and improving on 'em. And this Region had a training specialist that worked with me quite a lot and we developed some of these training plans that are in use here now. The format and some of that, and I think some of the other Regions are using it, I guess they're still using it, the last that I saw one of the training handbooks.

KM In what kind of training?

FL Well, the smokejumper training.

KM The jumping itself?

FL Yeah, all of the jumping and the fire training as well. Even the ground crews, I think now the, what they call the guard camps, I think, I suppose they still have 'em, but anyway, I think they use much the same plans, too, that we're using. And some of them even have incorporated a lot of the physical training in, as well.

KM Do you remember some of the earlier pilots? You had the Johnsons, but they mostly operate out of Missoula?

FL Yeah, they operated out of Missoula, but we worked with them a lot over here, especially Dick Johnson. And there was Bob Johnson and there was a fellow named Slim Phillips at that time and they were the three main people that I had worked with over there. Then they had a contract fellow here by the name of Earl Vance that he did a lot of high altitude aerial photography for 'em and he had a big old boxcar, a... was a Fairchild and they used it to jump out of as well, over here at least. And, but there were a lot of the later pilots then, I knew their names at the time, but I can't recall them right here now, but the early ones I worked with there, especially in Missoula. And then Chet Derry, one of the smokejumpers, one of the original, he was a, well, he was one of the Derry brothers so he was actually on the experiment here, too. After the war, why, he was also a smokejumper pilot. Flew Travelaires over there for Johnsons and then there was one or two other smokejumpers that were pilots for Johnsons, fellow by the name of Bill Yaggy and Bill's in my
crew in 1940 when I was over there at Missoula, but he was killed on a crash down in Idaho somewhere, dropping cargo or something. [Bill Yaggy was killed in 1946 while on a seeding job.]

KM Did you ever do project burns like slash burns or...?

FL Well, only in... probably working with the Districts we did some. But usually they furnished their own supervision and most of their own people. But, at times some of the jumpers would work on those slash disposal jobs, but... on some of the burning. Nearly always, the Districts did their own burning in this area at least.

KM Yeah. But that was a policy to burn slash that way?

FL Yes.

KM What did you see as the type of people who... what were the qualities of the jumpers who got involved in the program? How were they different than anybody else?

FL I don't know. They really aren't any different from anybody else. In fact, so many of 'em work and coordinate and cooperate with so many of the District crews that you don't really tell 'em apart. I think that we were able to shift 'em around 'em a lot of their project work to where they had a good quality experience and quantity of experience as well. That way they could work right in with the District crews. And many times on project work that we just sent the squad leader out with the crew and the squad leader was around, had enough experience to go ahead with nearly any job that a District person could. And so many of these jumpers went to work on Districts, that they just kind of milled right in with the rest of the crew. In fact, there's several jumpers, I think, ex-jumpers, up here on the Winthrop District now, and especially people after I was retired, I think. But the same way that, going out on the forest, that these fellows got quite a lot of exposure, especially on fires and on different types of other project work that... like seeding projects and things like that on big fires that, like, in other parts of the Region that they'd want jumpers to work on. And they had good exposure there and experience there. They became acquainted with the people and they just seem to fit right in, and after all, they're all blood, muscle, and bone, the same as any other person. They may have a different little quirks, or something like that, but...

KM Not any crazier for jumping out of an airplane?

FL No, I don't think so. At least I didn't consider myself crazy when I went into it because it was an opportunity to make more money and I was beginning to raise a family and it was important at that time to... even $50 or $60 a month more was a lot of money at that time. So those are some of the things...
KM Most of the jumpers were married and had children, and that kind of...?

FL Yeah, especially along the first because nearly all of 'em were older people, and it seemed to me after, soon after the war, why, well even during the war, when they started like getting the conscientious objectors in. They were right at the eighteen to about twenty-four year old, they were wanted into the service at that time. So they were young, most of those weren't married, there were a few of those that were married, but most of 'em were not. But soon after that, we began to get more married men and... or they got married during their tenure here, or wherever.

KM What do you think that people gain from jumping, what kind of skills and that kind of thing?

FL Well, I've been surprised at, I'm not sure what they were looking for, but for example, I've had several of 'em go out of here and go into banking.

KM Oh yeah. [laughs]

FL I know none of 'em ever had much of a savings account or anything like that, but there was something about the work that these people were interested in, and I had more than one of these bank presidents, and such as that call me up, now this is just one situation... and then so many of 'em have told me that when they gave their resume and they found out they'd been smokejumpers, that they got the job just right then. That seemed to clinch it. A lot of them with their background and training, and such as that, I think probably, discipline and the self-discipline as well. And probably the... they had to use the opportunity of using their common sense a lot of the time, too. Working with people, and things like that. I really never did find out just exactly what these people were looking for, but those are some of the things that they evidently what they were looking for. They were the only people that could use their common sense and do this kind of work, especially the jumping part of it, I think that would probably make an impression on them that they, not only could jump to a fire, but they could put it out. And their physical condition as well, I suppose. But I don't know just... we've had people in all walks of life, working for the State Department and we have two or three fellows back in the East there are Presidents of big corporations and electrical outfits, and such as that. They had no problems whatsoever. Then we had pilots in the... lots of pilots in the service went from here right into flying, they had no problems getting in. And, well, there's airline pilots, as well. I don't know, just about every walk of life, these... I run into 'em then.

KM Do many of 'em come back and keep in touch?

FL Yeah, it's surprising. Yeah. And then there are a lot of 'em that are nothing but smokejumper bums out there, and they're
still at it, you know. They don't want to do anything else, and... all of 'em go from here, or have gone from here up into Alaska and they seem like that they stay up there for years. Fellows I fought with through here years ago are still working up there jumping, so...

KM Do you see much of a change when someone comes in as a rookie and then say five to ten years later as they go out, anything in particular?

FL Well, you can always see these fellows mature. Especially year after year. Especially these fellows that go to college and you know, they mature right along with their age, I guess. It's partly mature, but along with their increase in knowledge and common sense and judgment and such as that. I think that's one of the things that helps them here, that it helps them increase their judgment and their common sense. Because after all, I used to tell 'em, we're going to teach you a way to do these things and when you get to a fire you might have to change it a little bit, that's going to be up to you and your common sense and your judgment to keep your, gettin' the job done and without hurting yourself or breaking up equipment and things like that. So it's a... and these fellows mature quite a lot and we hear it especially, or I did, hear it especially from parents. So many parents were scared to death to come over here and see their kids jump and things like that. But... and I had a lot of delinquents that I didn't know that I had, over the years. Those parents still come to me, and even the kids when I see 'em. I don't know what we did here to bring 'em out of it. I really didn't realize that I had a delinquent, but, that... they did the job or else they were told they were gonna go down the road and they found out we meant it, and things like that and they accepted the discipline and it was all to their benefit. I think that it brought a lot of kids out of the doldrums, you might say, broke 'em away from dope and things like that. They went ahead and made a good life for themselves.

KM Yeah. Did you ever have any problems with drugs?

FL We had a little bit here one time, but I just called the sheriff out here and he shook the place down and he found a little bit around there up there in the bunkhouse, but that was the last that ever showed up here that I knew of. Then I got, had pretty good ways of getting information, too, that, you know, that, these guys had probably experimented with it a little bit, but they evidently didn't stay with it. If they did, it was somewhere else.

KM Well, it's not too safe jumping if you're in that...

FL No, because the guy [inaudible], the squad leaders and those people, could tell it on 'em if they were using it and all, smell it or actions. Because they knew each person, just real intimate, almost, you know, after you jump 'em and work 'em and train 'em and things like that. You just know people and if
there's any change in 'em why, it's noticeable right away. So, we never did run into anything like that, had a few of 'em come back with a hangover and things like that, but if we weren't busy, I'd usually make 'em take some time off. Didn't give 'em sick leave or anything, that's self-inflicted, why, they can suffer it off by themselves. But the earlier days, when we first got the veterans back right fresh out of the war, World War II veterans, they were a little raunchy for a little while, but soon as they settled down to life again. They just come through that training and several of 'em had jumped in Normandy. These 82nd Airborne people, and one or two of 'em had been wounded and things like that. Then I had a young fellow from around the Olympic Peninsula, he was a full-blooded Indian and he had been wounded over in Bataan. Shot in the stomach with a machine gun and I don't know how the doctor passed him on his physical, but he did, but we had him over in Missoula to train and working on this overhead ladder and it pulled his stitches loose in his stomach, and inside and he started to bleed. So we had to just release, but he was kind of glad of it, too, because I was kind of getting to him. But he had been a paratrooper over in Bataan and one of them had jumped in there, I guess, when they took it back from the Japs. But there are so many things that I can't think of now that, you know, you think of 'em later, but that's it.

KM What, how is the view of jumping changed within the Forest Service itself?

FL Well, they seemed to be pretty well accepted now, as far as jumping itself is concerned. As the years went by, we had District Rangers and people like that that even trained, we trained 'em, in fact, he's in your Regional Office over there at Missoula now, a fellow by the name of Johnny Trotter. At least he was in the office over there the last I've heard, way up in the administration, but he was a District Ranger here and he'd been a paratrooper. And he decided well, he'd like to be able to go on to fires, like back country fires where they would need a fire boss, something like that and take over, but he wasn't here long enough to really get to do that. Because he had to much on the ball and they just started promoting him and he didn't, he was here probably one summer, long enough to get the training done. But from the early days, why, everybody looked down their nose at you. Even insurance people and like that that, I've had insurance people come to the door and want to sell me insurance and they'd ask me what I did and I'd tell 'em I was a smokejumper and they'd just fold up their book and go. And then soon after that, we, it got to the point that.... Well, our safety record was beginning to show up, we could buy insurance cheaper than the people in the mills, the lumber mills, and like that. And for quite a few years, we did an accident summary every year on our accidents and sent 'em into an insurance company and they could never find anything that was really any more dangerous about it than the man on the street. In fact, when we first started out, you see, they started us at a GS-4 rate is what they were going at, then they'd give you a GS-5 for the hazard, for being a parachute jumper. That was their original thinking on it, so
actually a smokejumper got one grade up above a GS-4, a ground man. It got to the point to where we weren't sure they were gonna let us have that anymore. Then, for years, we talk about hazard pay in our Regional meetings. That wasn't awfully accepted at all, you know, even from fighting fire or parachute jumping, and you say, well, you're not having any accidents, there is no hazard, but like the FBI, they carried a gun and they got hazard pay just because they carried a gun, and police. Then the firemen started getting hazard pay and so it was the year after I left, then, [laughter], I guess that they came in with this new retire...

[END OF SIDE A]

[BEGIN SIDE B]

KM So uh, jumpers have always started out as GS-5's, is that right?

FL Yes.

KM Then pretty much will remain at GS-6 until they get a squad leader position or something?

FL Right, yeah.

KM And each year they get a step increase?

FL Yeah, I think it's probably probably what they do now, but see that was the starting was a GS-5 and then the second year was a GS-6 and then the squad leader was a GS-7. Then they used to have GS-8. My position was a GS-8 for quite a few years and then they got away from that number and got their GS-9, and finally up to GS-11. That's what I was finally retired at, a GS-11, but I had quite a few increases [inaudible] grade increases, and such like that, that helped me out a lot, so it helped my retirement. So, I was pretty well up in a GS-12 rating when I, as far as the salary was concerned when I retired, which helped out a lot.

KM What were the steps of your own career?

FL Well, originally we started out as, as SP's. SP-1, 2, 3, 4, 5 and like that on up and then the rangers, they had what they call a P-rating which, I guess, meant permanent. They are semi-permanent and then permanent ratings and then they eliminated all that and went on to the GS ratings, so actually I guess my rating was always around about a GS-8.

KM And what was your title?

FL Well, I started out as a squad leader and then they changed it over to kind of an aerial officer and that's what it was for years, was just kind of an aerial project officer. And then, I think before I retired, I think they changed it over to a project
manager or something like that, and they kept fooling around with
different ratings. The thing that confused 'em was the job here
was so much different than the one that was one the ranger
districts, and how are they going to compare them and grade
them, both according to the work load and the salaries and things
like that. But for years here, we were given the same privileges
as the ranger district. I went to the ranger meetings each
month, right along with the rangers and I would directly, write
to the forest supervisor. He was my boss except he would delegate
to the fire man, so actually the fire staff man was my boss. I
was really liable direct to the forest supervisor the same as the
rangers were. So up to that point... but they just seemed to have
a, something that you'd never figure out or didn't want to or
something about the position. They kept fooling around with
different titles and things like that and really didn't make any
difference to me as long as I got my grade you know, what they
wanted to call me, and I'm not sure what Bill's title here is
now, project manager or something, I suppose.

KM  Station manager or something.

FL  Yeah, I think maybe that's it.

KM  How about on fires, did jumpers go on fires [as] much as
other than grunts, I mean did they go as fire bosses or line
bosses?

FL  Oh yeah, nearly all of our squad leaders were at least
division boss, had division boss ratings. And that was from
being on the right number of fires and not from going to the fire
schools and things like that. They had the actual fire
experience and even then many times... see, the first man on a
fire is a fire boss and even when two jumpers go on there,
supposedly one of them is designated a fire boss. Supposedly,
but, usually the one with more experience, or something like
that, until someone gets there to relieve them or the fire's out
or whatever, because he's responsible for the reports and such as
that. Each of the squad leaders, at least, usually had at least
a division boss rating and even then they were used quite a lot
as probably temporary fire bosses. And I suspect a lot of them
now that are on districts that actually have their fire boss
rating, or should have, especially on the district, and then some
are specialized crews and such as that.

KM  Sector bosses.

FL  Yes. Yeah.

KM  Did you see much use of tractors and that kind of thing on
fires?

FL  Well, not in the back country, but we usually worked with
them a lot out here in the lower country. Originally when I first
was still a ground pounder we had a big fire team at the ranger
station where I was stationed up at Eight Mile and had a special
truck to haul 'em in and harnesses and two-way plows and things like that, that take on a lot of low country fires where they can get a horse around on 'em and such as that. That was really before they had any bulldozers or anything like that, but then they got cat's with plows on them and finally bulldozers and all kinds of machinery like that.

KM They used horses some, then?

FL Yes, to start with.

KM You had to be trained in animal care then?

FL Well, that was before smokejumpers, even. Well, they still had 'em in 1939, I guess, because we had a fire team there at Eight Mile yet, and that's where I was stationed there at Eight Mile. But they did have what they call flying squadron, that their different specialists are around on each forest that could gather... (as far as I know, were never used) in fact, I was a member of it when I was a ground pounder yet. Supposedly could come down like Omak or Okanogan and get in an airplane and go to, like, Bend, Oregon or somewhere like that. Even then, why if we went on from detail to fires, even be driving at night or something like that to get there. So we never did really use that "flying squadron" as such.

KM That was before jumping?

FL Yes.

KM They didn't keep it up after jumpers?

FL No, not that I know of. No, I don't think so. However, they did begin to move overhead more by aircraft and such as that.

KM How'd you see the development of chute handling training because people come in here and don't know a thing about how to handle a parachute?

FL Well, that's all included in their ground training and I think it's all, oh, much the same idea yet, you know. Now, I guess, they have toggles and things like and the parachutes are a little different, but it's all primarily the same idea, guiding parachutes. Except when we first started out we didn't have single lines except on the Eagle you had the guideline. But like on the Irvins and things like that, you either had to pull down the whole quarter of the parachute or you pick out two or three lines to get a hold of and start it down. It would turn you a little bit, but it just didn't turn you that much. Most of your turning was done with one of the rear risers, usually, and you had risers up here for four or five feet, so that's usually what you grabbed right a hold of that one riser and pulled down on it and it would pull down a quarter of your parachute then and give it a certain amount of mobility. But as far as forward speed was
concerned, about all you could do was turn yourself into the wind and then you were still drifting the same as if you were going sideways with the wind. When we got the Eagles, why then with that guiding ear and the guideline on it and, why, man you could flip them right around and flip them in the wind, too, but when you got right square into the wind, why you'd probably snap you right on by. It was hard to hold you into the wind because they just wanted to turn and not much you could do about it. The only thing you could do really was slip 'em and get 'em down out of the wind as fast as you could. When you got close to the ground, why, you want to be heading straight in or else you come in backwards.

KM So it's fairly tricky to get them into the wind?

FL Yeah. But usually, as I say, we didn't have any problem turning with the wind, because they just naturally turn that way. Because I know... well, actually the jumps I made after the foul-up over here that I went clear over here on this hillside above this ranch. Yeah, the wind would come up real strong by that time and I just had no control over that. All I wanted to get over that powerline over there then, there was an old powerline around there, and so I made sure I was with the wind so I didn't get into that. But I landed in the brush, rosebushes up there on the hill, caught up a bunch of those. That was the one thing we found out just from that jump, that you could stand quite a lot of wind on a landing and up to that time, why they said, "if there's very little wind, you shouldn't jump." But I was probably doing 20, 25 miles per hour when I hit the ground and plowed up the rosebushes. If it hadn't been for the brush holding my harness and stuff down because the parachute inflated and that would have drug me off up the hill a ways probably. There was a whole bunch of range cattle up on top of the ridge there and they saw that parachute billow out there and, man, they come thundering down the mountain and split right at the head of the parachute and went right around me. They're sure looking things over.

KM No bull, huh? [laughs]

FL No, there was just a lot of steers and old range cows and things like that. But I was afraid one of them would run through there and get tangled up in the lines and he'd drag me down the mountain, so I got out of there pretty quick.

KM Yeah. [pause] Yeah, I was talking with Bill a little bit about fire fighting techniques that have changed, of course, at one time you had, using trenchers more, but anything else that you've seen change a lot?

FL Well, I think the firefighting seems to be pretty well stabilized now. Same old hand tools and in fact, the pulaski tool, I guess I got to use one of the first ones in 1930. I was just a kid then and they were accepted, you know. They had these old grub hoes and axes then and we had two different tools, soon
they became to be a quite a favorite. And I've chopped down
trees as thick as four feet in diameter... fir tree.

KM With a pulaski?

FL With a pulaski and a good sharp pulaski and a good handle
and everything in 'em and you could chop just as fast as you
could with a good axe. Beside the digging quality. But in 1930,
all we used it for was back in here in some peat moss and an old
lick bed down... and a we had to dig down pretty near three feet
or better to get down to dirt. So we chopped down each side and
then we'd use that back part just to kind of roll up out of
there. We found out it was good for that, when it came to
chopping out fire in a log or something, why we'd go get an axe
and, it just wasn't accepted there for a while. Then they began
to [be] standard on the smokechaser fire packs. One of the first
tools I used and I started out chasing fires like on a saddle
horse on back was two of them had a grub hoe on the one hand and
a shovel on the other and each would come off, but to carry if
you had a pack or something, you could take them both off and put
them in your fire pack or in saddlebags or whatever you had. Use
the handle then for a walking stick or whatever, but then when
you'd go out to use them, why then you'd switch from one to the
other, grub hoe in one hand and the shovel on the other. They
weren't so good either because they'd always come loose, and so I
got to using that pulaski, why it became a standard then.

KM About 1930?

FL Well, soon after that, probably '32 or somewhere along
there. 1930, I know, they weren't accepted. Those old
firefighters they just wouldn't have anything to do with them.
They'd take those big old wide grub hoes, you know, building fire
line, why they'd move a lot of dirt, but then when they got
different methods, you know, to stir up the dirt and take one of
those pulaski's just sideways, why you can move a lot of dirt
with them, too, And you don't dull your chopping blade.

KM So you just carried a file with you?

FL Yeah, and it always, it seemed like a file's been a standard
for years and, you know, in the fire packs.

KM You talked a little bit before about the food on fires, that
at first you'd have C rations and that kind of stuff and then
everually you got into a little bit of dried food and what
happened after that?

FL In 1945 we started experimenting with hot food. But we still
had rations, especially for the jumpers and first we were using
the military surplus, military rations because they were pretty
much dehydrated, and hard tack and all kinds of stuff like that.
Then we got to dropping this hot food. We first tried it out on
jumpers to make sure that it would stay hot and then it was
edible, tasty and they liked it so well, they started trying it
out on the ground crews. Then from there, why, the frozen foods then put us out of the hot food business. But for years that was pretty much standard on this forest and even some of the adjoining forest where they had isolated fire crews that... had a rig that would drop them their tools, their food, and their beds. All they had to do was walk into that fire and a lot of them we fed three times a day, hot food, you know.

KM That's a lot of cargo drops.

FL And especially when we only have one airplane and got so that they could send us up an extra airplane and we'd use them both for jumpers and/or cargo dropping.

KM No limits on money for fuel or anything like that, huh?

FL Well, during fires, you know, you had your F.F. funds, so everything was charged to that. Like the food that we had to go and buy and make up in our own kitchens and then the airplane time and things like that. And for years there, we didn't get any overtime, either, you know. So then we did start getting comp. [compensatory] time and gradually got into overtime.

KM When did you start getting comp. time?

FL Well, it began, I think, in about 1942, I think. Started to begin to get some comp. time. You had to have it in a diary, you had to keep a diary. But mind you, this all was in the manuals for a long time, evidently, overtime and compensatory time. But while I was working in one of the offices, why, I was into the books, and the Ranger that I worked under said, "Well, we're gonna run this outfit by the book, you go by the book." So I just took it for granted and I had a couple of fellows go off on a fire, so I turned in overtime for 'em and boy, he about hit the sky. The supervisor... and they wanted to know, "Where you gettin' all of this?" And I says, "It's right there in the book." And, you know, soon after that, then you had to back it up wit... first, you got compensatory time and then they changed it to overtime, then. But for a long time, the overtime was just straight time, there was no time and a half. But a lot of those Rangers and people like that, they were just goin' ahead and doin' the job, you know, and they kind of agree in their ranger meetings, I guess, how they're gonna do these things, and not even look at the book. Well, at that time, too, they only had one Administrative Officer in the Okanogan office. Now they have people on people over there and the same in the Ranger Districts. And, of course, when I was dispatching up here, I was almost the office girl and everything. Sometimes during the summer, why, they'd hire a stenographer or typist, and things like that, to do the typing for you. When I first started here, for years I did all the time-keeping and fire reports, the whole shebang. I had all one drawer down in an old wooden desk. I had about a fifteen man crew then, but the time slips came and about a half dozen different sheets and you had to put carbon between each one of them in order to get it made up. To hire a person it took six
different forms. We had a saying, "two to hire, two to fire, and three to keep," something like that or one to keep, something like that. Then they got, gradually they got forms all put together, that hold carbon and things like that. Same on the time sheets. Those were some of the greatest improvements, I think, was a lot of the paperwork. Of course, it became kind of overbearing, too, as far as the paperwork is concerned. They had a fifteen man crew across there and just started, why, just had this little old one room over there and that one old wooden desk that somebody else didn't want and you end up with a building like this, rows and rows of manuals and people in here to do the work in the summertime, because of all the paperwork. So it's a... that was a big part of the job as well. And we always did all of our own hiring out of here after the... well, after about 1945, then I began to do all of my own hiring then. Before that time, they usually did it out of the Supervisors Office and just hired the people and sent them over to me to be trained and they did all the... handling the finances and things like that. But that gradually changed, too, because I had the offices, the dispatching to do a lot of that work anyway and I learned it in there so I could do our own work over here then. So it gradually built up that way.

KM Did you ever think of leaving jumping for something else?

FL Never did. It was always so interesting and new things coming up and new developing and such as that. I had offers to go to different jobs, but realized we had our own property here and raising our family here and the kids going to school here. I was really satisfied with the job, but... there was always something new to be done. Up until about the last two years, and then all I did then was train people to take in behind me because I knew I was gonna be retiring in a year or two. But they had enough people trained to do the work for me that I didn't have to go far and do it, so...

KM Plus you had other help with the office and all that.

FL Oh yeah, all that office help, but we had, some part of our office help was promoted out of here. One went from here to the Ranger District, then to the Okanogan office and then down to Portland, he retired down there. And even they got a pretty good background in here on a lot of different things, too, you know.

KM Did you see, you probably saw the territory that was covered by jumpers, change quite a bit. At first it started out local and became bigger.

FL Well, yeah, it's... that's what it did, start out. Like the North Cascade at that time was kind of a wilderness area back there. But then it just opened up to everything, it was, where a fire would burn, but that only took about one year to change that. The only other change came that, originally the Forest Service was responsible for all the lowland stuff, even the state lands, and then the state came back and took on their own lands.
But then, so much of the time we put people on their fires, too. Because, it was... low country fires are pretty explosive and take off fast and usually we'd get somebody on 'em, make sure they were controlled, then turn 'em right over to 'em. There was very little finances changed hands or anything else. Pretty much agreement. And the other thing was, a policy in the Forest Service regardless where the fire was, if it, like was in a draw, running up on the National Forest land, why we had the privilege of initial attack. Especially like, when we were in our, kind of, automatic dispatch and things like that. Maybe we'd go get the fire under control and turn it back to the state or colony or whoever was involved. Or even to the Ranger District, and such as that. Regardless, it takes a fire, it doesn't have to be very far out of the town, so you can beat a ground crew to it. Because we just automatic dispatch as soon as we hear it on the radio why, start suiting men up and airplane was warming up and usually nine minutes was about the average take-off time going to a fire.

KM That's pretty good.

FL Yeah. Because it's so handy right here and the way the set up was, just blow the whistle, and usually the first guys is workin' right there in the loft and all they had to do jump over and put their suits on and the pilot was out there warming up the airplane, packs and everything were already in there.

KM So you put your chute on in the plane, then?

FL No, no they put 'em on here. Well, the fire packs were in the airplane, but the parachutes, they put 'em on down here.

KM You had a regular jump list like what we have. What... did you, you were working pretty much under the ten o'clock policy, then? How did you see that change as the years went on?

FL Well, it really hadn't changed, it was beginning [to] kind of change a little bit before I left, but so was the wilderness fires and things like that they'd just begin to back off on them a little bit. We were still pretty much, when I left, still in the automatic dispatch. [It] was after I left, then, that they begin to get, kind of, computer-wise or something, doing it a lot of it by... and a lot of it they'd have studies and things like that. Fire conditions and burning conditions and all of that, they had it all computerized, run through one place over there, but, if they ever get a fire bust like we've had here that they'll be so far behind that they'll never be able to handle it. Because even with the central, with our central dispatch here, we got up a certain amount of fires, or work, then the fire situation automatically turned back to the districts then. From then on, why, before we'd take action on a fire, we still had the automatic dispatching, it was also with the fire people on the Districts, so we still worked with them, you know. But now I think everything has to come out of the supervisor's office. You see, years ago when I was first starting here in the '30's, they
had a central dispatcher here on the forest. Well, soon got one... well, get a dozen fires on two or three different districts, why, he had to call each District and get people going on each District and get people going on each District and there was a fire burning out here already, you know, then they got back to individual dispatchers, what they call P.A.'s or protective assistants and they did their own forests, their own dispatching then. Then if they wanted outside help, why, went to the supervisor's office and the fireman over there, why, then he'd go to the Portland office, or something like that. But, soon as we got the teletype in here that we worked directly with the Portland office so much of the time especially aircraft dispatch and help for equipment and things like that.

KM But most of the time you had at least two planes here every year?

FL Oh yeah. After we got up to bigger crews, then we'd.... and then they even got to being a DC-3 would be here as one airplane and maybe Twin Beeches, or whatever. Then they started getting some of the Twin Otters, and things like that. They just started some of that. In fact, the Beech-99 was, just before I retired, was being used like down in Virginia and some of those places. They were just gradually getting into faster, more dependable aircraft. So much of those old DC-3's and Twin Beeches were from 25 to 35 years old, you know. To be down fluttering around on top of the ridge and in the canyons with them, it just wasn't good. Even though they are a very stable airplane and an excellent jump airplane. So I think these new turbo-props and a lot of those are faster and yet they'll slow down slow enough.

KM So you probably saw at least a little bit of a change in the jump procedures like positioning, I imagine, stayed pretty much the same, but the roll was changed.

FL Well, we went through a lot of that, when we first started rolling, it was just anything to get off your feet. Then, we had two or three different rolls, like in Region 1 and then they come out with this "Allen roll" and...

KM That's over the shoulder?

FL Yeah, twisting on your feet and then they started turning ankles, and things like that with that.... Over your shoulder. Then I think we just went back to some of our original, just to get off of your feet. Then our parachutes [were] beginning to improve a little bit more, too, to where you didn't get hard landings like they used to. Especially those old Eagles, why, you really came in with them, they were always seven or eight miles an hour and then if you had a little wind behind you, you had no trouble getting off your feet, I'll tell you that. But the canopies and things like that are changing so that it makes it easier on the landings. But those rolls, for a long time, they was trying something all the time and they would try it for a year and like that "Alan roll," tried it for two or three years.
It was just hard to teach someone to do that, you know. It took a lot of coordination to get on the ground, your knees bent, and get a twist and get off of your feet and try and get over onto your shoulder, and things like that. It just wasn't working. It didn't work as good. There were people that could and then people that couldn't. Yeah, that was probably, that and the let-down was something we seemed to be continually working on, was...

KM Well, that's kind of stabilizing, both of those have kind of stabilized in the past three years.

FL I think so, yeah, now, and especially with the canopies. I understand now they've come back to using the let-down all sewed into the suit. I think that's what they... had some out here with the D-rings and the webbing all sewed into the suit for let-down.

KM The harnesses are, they're plain around harnesses being sewed into the suit and I haven't heard of let-down ropes.

FL Well, anyway, one time we sewed some webbing right down to the ground, so you were setting right in it and come up here, the D-ring right here, then you thread your rope through here and up and...

KM Rappel. Yeah.

FL But now evidently, I guess they got a lot of these fancy gizmos now like they use for repelling, don't they? Are they still using them?

KM Region One isn't using 'em, but I don't know about anybody else.

FL I don't know whether they're using 'em here. They were the going thing there for awhile, about the time that I was retiring, I know that... but I could never see those because if you lost it or something, why, you was out of luck. But that was the thing that got to me that I had to experience back in those old Eagles, of... they open so hard and a lot of times they just tear your pocket right off, it would snap off, especially with the rope in it. A lot of times your rope would go or that other little line or little things that you needed to make the job go and snap out of your pocket. So that was the thing that we worked on quite a lot here was to get away from all that extra, pieces and parts and things that you would have to think of to bring back and a lot of those expensive... that you couldn't really afford to leave out there.

KM So your jump partner would have to climb up to you and get you out.

FL Well after we went to these other flappin' around-type fire chutes, you didn't get those hard openings either, anymore, like we used to, so that eliminated a lot of that part of it. Quite
often, that was one of things that we always had to repair, was that rope pocket on the, when we jumped those Eagles. [ Interruption] Well, it is an interesting life, there was always something that I think that we had. But then for years, I think I said before and each unit was doing a lot of their own experimenting and things like that. Sometimes they almost got out of hand and then they got so they'd disagree on these, and mine was best. After they got these regional meetings goin' pretty good and then the upper echelon, administrators, said, "Well, you need to standardize," so up... settling down pretty good then.

KM Yeah. What did you see as the differences between the bases?

FL Well, actually for a long time there was usually quite a lot of competition between the bases, you know, there was kind of friendly competition. But to have the best equipment and doin' the best thinkin' and things like that. But when you get to puttin' all your thinkin' together, why, it really turned out pretty good then. And then we'd settle on one thing and it made it so much easier that... when we'd go from one base to another to work with those people, or they came here and were using the same equipment and got out of your harness the same and your let­down was the same and you used just all the same equipment, why, it just, really simplified it, made it so much safer, too. We'd go to those regional meetings and somebody had a new let­down idea, why we'd just went out there in the loft and tried it out. Everybody tried it, you know. You decided either to use it or not use it, or maybe somebody would try it for awhile or try it for a summer, or maybe we'd all try it for a summer, so that was just much better.

KM So that was also between Alaska, once they started going and, I mean, all jump bases in the country?

FL And then the Canadians had a small base for awhile and they were training at Missoula, so that they used the same equipment and such as that up there. They didn't stay with it very long.

KM With jumping?

FL No.

KM They... you have... did you have coverage of some of their territory?

FL Well, we jumped in Canada along the line up here several times, you had a mutual agreement with the Canadians in fightin' fire, uh the Okanogan did at least. And I think all the other regions do, too, along, you know, they have mutual timber because so many times we could get to the fires back in here long before the Canadians could. We jumped as high as ten men on Canadian fires and part of it's to protect ourselves, really, because if they build a long fire line from the top of the ridge clear down
to the Satan River to keep it from comin' on across the canyon, you know, and gettin' into the United States timber. But they are real fine people to work with up there. And they'd come over, they had these, that small aircraft for droppin' retardant and they gradually got into bigger aircraft, too, but they come over and drop retardant on our fires if our aircraft is busy, and especially if they were right along the line.

KM They... you probably saw the change into different policies of fire fighting, like the ten o'clock and then eventually it got into the first type of, I guess they call it, you're not supposed to say let-burn, but confinement?

FL Well, ten o'clock was still pretty much in when I left here so that's been twelve years ago now. But, as I say, it was just beginning to try out this wilderness business where they go in and look it over and maybe they'd let it burn. But most of the time these old rangers, they were still pretty much fire shy, you might say. When the fire started back there, they wanted to get it put out and so it was pretty hard, when they started getting these younger and newer rangers in, why they could accept it a little more, they just didn't have that old background to them where you get to him by ten o'clock. Those things are just pretty hard to, to forget, you know, pounding it into you for years that you... and in fact, our old rations, the first rations we saw in 1930 is that minutes count on 'em and then you know how much a minute count when you jump on a saddle horse and start for thirty miles back in here somewhere, something like that or walkin' or something like that. One or two minutes just didn't mean that, but you had a... see, with an automobile, if you had a... like, when I was there at the guard station, I had three minutes to be on my way after I got the report with an automobile, or I had five minutes with a saddle horse. So you can just imagine how much those minutes is going to mean when you're back there fifteen or twenty miles or something like that. But, you see, it stayed with me all during my career that you get out there and get goin' on those fires. And as especially so here with me because at one time we, for a long time, we worked with just one airplane and then maybe two and they were pretty slow. If you had quite a few fires going and especially on an adjoining forest, why at the end of the day, maybe you didn't get all your fires covered and so those few minutes meant a lot, especially when you're working with airplanes, and things like that. That if you save a few minutes, why you could get to another fire before dark. Or get a crew supplied and that was pretty important, you know, you had a crew out there with nothing to eat, no beds, had walked in and they wanted some supper and a place to sleep that night.

KM They jumped with PG bags like they do today.

FL Oh, you mean...

KM Their own personal gear, but not...
FL Oh yeah, yeah, the jumpers did.

KM But they didn't take any food with 'em?

FL Yeah, we had food in their fire pack.

KM Yeah, right, but you didn't carry the fire packs up on the, on the, in the planes, and then drop it to them after they've landed with their food in it.

FL Yeah, that's the way we did it.

KM But you're talkin' about the hot food that was...

FL Oh yeah, yeah, what I'm talkin' about are other crews that walked in or district crews or something like that, yeah. And a lot of times, they may take the tools with 'em, but most of the time they walk in without tools and we drop them and drop their beds and their meals. Usually we'd start 'em off, usually with quite a bunch of rations, so that [if] we did fail to get back, that... that they would have at least some rations to hold 'em over, but so many times that you get a rash of fires, why you'd be busy trying to get 'em all covered and maybe if you got to foolin' around and didn't get a job done, why, somebody missed out. I spent too much time out on fires myself to... without food and beds and things like that, but I didn't like to see anybody else have to do the same thing.

KM No.

FL But then we got other cooperator aircraft, too, that we could use and for instance, we use Arrow Commanders here, help fill the cargo and we could two men out of 'em and things like that. They were stationed right over here at Okanogan, approved aircraft. The Wenatchee Airservice had some that we could use, things like that, especially on cargo dropping.

KM What about when you first started jumping, you had ankle braces and abdominal brace, and that kind of thing, what was that for?

FL Well, that came primarily from the professional jumpers. And the other thing they didn't know at that time, the ankle braces was for these landings back here in the mountains, they didn't know just what to expect. And then we had our back braces which were... a big wide thing around here and come right around your back, but we started finding out that you'd hurt your back on both sides of that, it'd support you right through the middle all right, but you needed your back flexible, so that it would bend and the same way with our ankles that you'd bind them up tight right there and...

END OF TAPE
This is the third part of an interview with Francis Lufkin by Kim Maynard for the Smokejumpers Oral History Project, June 7, 1984. OH #133-63.

KM This is Francis Lufkin again at the reunion. Well, would you want to tell me about that?

FL Well, you had said this is part of the early development that he actually developed on the experiment, this particular part of it. But it happened to be Buzz Derry, who's here at the reunion now, and on the opening, at that time, the system of the Eagle parachute, the harness and everything was solid all the way through. And it had big, long risers on it and it guidelines, but on this opening, one of the risers slapped him along side of the [inaudible] on the left side, split his cheek open and I just noticed the other day, I was showin' some fellows there last night that he still had the scar from that. But from that time on, they started using the football helmet then, and they went to Seattle and had a mask made up which is exactly the same as it is today.

KM Oh yeah?

FL The same mask, they've tried to duplicate it and they tried other things with it, but I see they're still using the same mask. It's never been changed. The football helmet, of course, it's changed and different styles and things like that, materials and such as that, because the original ones just a regular old leather helmets. Now, we have plastic and... all fancied-up like that, you know. But I thought that would be a point of interest because that actually occurred in 1939, this face protection just from that... being slapped in the face like that.

KM But you did wear helmets at first?

FL No, the first few jumps they just used a regular old, kind of leather pilot's helmet, you know. Like they used to used in the open cockpits and things like that. But that didn't offer much protection, especially going into the timber, for example, this riser that slapped him under the chin. But that old Eagle was very, very good at that and I was hoping that... things flew around pretty hot and heavy, because on my first fire jump I got my chin opened up, just from a... and they were short risers then. Came under my chin, and I split my chin open and it also popped a hole in my parachute canopy. I remember my partner who was a guy named Smith, on that jump, and he was also the only rigger then, the Project Superintendent at that time when he saw that chute, he really chewed him out because he thought he packed a chute with a hole in it, it had been torn in. But it wasn't that, it was from the opening shock that it just popped holes in them. This is probably, oh, ten inches, a ten inch triangle that just popped a big hole right in it.

KM Just, just from the pressure of the wind?
Yeah. Yeah, you'd see it floppin', but you could hear those chutes open for four or five miles on a quiet day.

Really? Oh gee, wow. Well, you were telling me once about how you... one of your jumps you had a malfunction and you pulled the reserve?

Yeah, that was on my third jump.

That was your third jump, okay.

Well, that was, at that time they were giving us wind jumps and we were trying to buck the wind and those old Eagle parachutes, which is practically impossible because it took a lot of strength just to hold them into the wind and you had to really maneuver and, but they'd catch them so quick and just take it right away from you. The intention of this jump was daylight in the morning and we had a good crosswind to the airport. So that's what Frank wanted us to do, is jumping across the river about, oh, pretty near a half mile from the airport. And right over the main highway between Winthrop and Twisp. I got out of the airplane, we were counting to three at that time before we pulled the ripcord, that was our instructions. We were also jumping at about 3500 feet elevation. And as I went out of there, when I, by the time I got done counting to three why, I turned head down, and my feet were up in the air and so the chute. When it opened, it went right down my back and up my feet and wrapped right around, the parachute wrapped right around my right foot. And as soon as it did, I saw what was happening and that thing went really fluttering in the wind, I was taking it down. And I looked down at the highway to see where I was and I could see the highway and that yellow strip running right down it. I turned right around it and grabbed for my emergency and I just had got a good hold on it and started to pull on it. And that pouch chute flew off of there. That chute opened right now and, of course, the shock, it threw my arms out and I pulled the rip cord anyway and then I had both chutes, so when the backpack opened, my chest pack just slithered, just shot out of there, you know, from the force. So I knew I had to get back across the river and I gathered it all up and held it in between my legs. But silk, it was just so slithering, you know, you couldn't hardly hang onto it and it'd keep slidin' down, and I get headin' across the river, and pretty soon I got over the river and it was up real high and I could see it was gonna be pretty close. So I just turned around, turned that chute around and went right back out into this big alfalfa field that was there. And I kept pulling that chute up, so I wouldn't get out and pull me back across the river. Because once they got out in front of you, they just acted like a big sail, really pulled you out, maybe you've had that experience or seen 'em, but anyway. I kept it deflated anyway and then I landed out in this alfalfa field and there was a farmer walkin' down there, this was four o'clock in the morning about. And he was walkin' along there and spread his water and goin' down to the other part of the ditch to spread some there and I come slithering right in beside him. I was six feet from
him, I was staying out of the ditch, I had to dodge that, too. [laughs] But here was about a foot of water out in this alfalfa. And man, I scooped a bunch of that in my collar and I had that chute down in it and it scared him half to death. He was a swinging that shovel around there and he didn't know what was going on. All this going on around him and he hadn't even seen any of it.

KM  Quite a shock.

FL  Then the old farmer, he came out there and invited me in for breakfast, and about that time, they drove around there in a truck and picked me up. But then that was a... something else then, that we were having trouble with the guys tipping too far and so Frank cut the count back to two, then.

KM  What do you mean tipping too far?

FL  Well, you was getting... you were hanging out there on the kind of a bar and so you got pretty good position, you know, till the wind hits you, then you start tipping one way or the other. Either over frontwards or over backwards. That's what I had done, was tipped over backwards and count to three, why, that's when the parachute went out down my back and up around my legs. So he cut the count back to two, then. After you left the airplane, then you started your count. That was one and there was supposed to be at least a second between. You were plenty far away because man, you were real motating away from there. Kind of staying up with the airplane all right, but your down speed was increasing.

KM  And then took a few seconds just for the chute to come, to deploy?

FL  Well, those chutes open faster than was ever... I mean, more than enough for the CAA requirements at that time. They opened so fast. It was the same thing that... I was just telling some of the fellows here, out there last night, that after I found out where that Sentinel High School is out here... you know where it is out there? Well, that used to be Hale Field in that area. And that's where I did the three jumps for the CAA that formed to prove the static line that Derry's had built there during the winter. That was about April in 1941, I think, somewhere around there.

KM  Now, how long was that static line, was that about a two second drop?

FL  Well, I can't remember the exact length on that particular static line. We changed it several times over the years, but it seemed to me, let's see, there would be... for one side, then back, that would be close to three feet there. I imagine about nine feet long at that time.

KM  So it made... so it was about a three second deployment, or
You had, but they didn't time the parachute until it was open, see, [when] the cover was off. Not from the time that you left the airplane with the static line strung out. But the chute... soon as the cover was off, I think they said it had to be fully open in one and one-half seconds and this opened so fast, that that guy pushed his stop watch, he couldn't even... it happened so fast, he couldn't stop it, you know. And three times, have 'em make three jumps for that. But I just thought the other night if I go over and tell those kids that I made some parachute jumps there in 1941, they probably wouldn't believe it, there their in their schoolyard, you know.

Because at that time it seemed like we drove for a long ways out into the boonies, you know, to get to the airport, it was all flat country out through there and grassland and-

Yeah. Well, no, there was a road out there, two of them, it was Hale Field at that time. That's where the Johnson Brothers operated from, too. That's also where we took our riggers test later in spring there, there were several of us that took that rigger's examination which required three days, at that time.

Oh, so it was kind of similar to rigger's test today?

Well, today, you know, you have this multiple choice and maybe you pack one parachute for you're practical. I supposed it's the same, yet. But then, see, there was several types of parachutes, at least three makes of parachutes then within each make then there was usually two to three types as a seat back and chest or something like that. And at that time you had to be able to pack all of those types, makes and types. So you didn't know which one they were gonna give you out there for your examination, either, on the practical. You had sometimes that it took about a day, to a day and a half, for the written, and then about a day, to a day and a half, for your practical, trying to pack some of these chutes. So it was quite a little examination at that time.

Yes, sounds like it. And they had a qualified rigger to come out and test you and see?

No, that was the CAA, but I don't think those fellows knew much about parachutes, you know. They knew a little bit, but I still have my old rigger's ticket yet today and the number is 55056-41, the '41 is the year. But it soon... happened more over at Winthrop, I think, because I was there again, but the FAA started coming in there and it wasn't long before they just gave us the training job and also most of the examinations as well. Sometimes, they brought their writtens in and... which was just a
multiple choice in maybe fifteen or twenty minutes, but we not only did the training, but we also gave them the practical test. By the time we finished training them, we knew what they could do anyway. At that time, of course, we only had the seat, or I mean, the backpacks and chest packs, however, we did usually train some of them on oh... commercial seat packs and backpacks, and things like that some of the pilots use.

KM Now what's a seat pack, is that down here?

FL Yeah, you set on it, you actually set on it and it has the harness all the way down the back and the risers run clear from the shoulders clear down around and under your seat and hooks into the canopy and it's usually a square pack. Then normally, they were 24 foot parachutes. Round, flat and Irvins and things like that were the main types, or makes, at that time.

KM That doesn't get in the way of your position in the air?

FL Well, no, but this is primarily for pilots, this particular chute. But at the time, uh, there was an early cargo dropping sometimes we'd use those, from the cargo droppers. But we could... had developed, or at least Frank Derry had developed, what they called a B-8, which is, actually made the cover, built the cover and the whole parachute. Ripcord and the whole thing. We did a lot of that at Nine Mile in the... in 1941. Because Chet was there and so was Frank Derry. But we worked in the loft there most of the time, just this... we had a seven-man squad and that was about all there was to do is work in the loft. After that, after Frank made that up, why, that was our standard backpack for cargo jumping in. And it had Eagle canopes in it because they would open at such low altitudes. So everybody had a Eagle backpack and I had one for years, I think it's still there at the base in Winthrop, I think Bill's taking care of it there.

KM Well, everyone sort of had their own and then packed their own.

FL Yeah.

KM Oh, I see.

FL Yeah, the cargo droppers at least.

KM Yeah.

FL Because most of the cargo droppers were squad leaders or had the riggers examination ticket.

KM Now, were... for your cargo boxes, did you have your own of those, too? Did everybody pack their own fire box?

FL No, at that time, what we had was fire packs.
Anytime you get to go over here in the hall, you'll see a picture of the 1940 Winthrop crew in there, that's Chet Derry, and no not Chetland, Buzz Derry and myself, and George Honey, and Glenn Smith. It's just the regular... all it was is smokechaser's fire pack at that time. Just like the smokechasers use when we, we didn't even have a bed, then, no sleeping bag. And it was dropped on a 7x7 burlap chute, actually what they were were wool sacks, if you know what they were. A wool sack is what the sheepherders and the people out here shearing sheep, put their wool into.

It was about seven feet high and then it was probably about, it would be close to three feet around or a little better, would make seven feet wide when you open it. And that's what they stuffed their wool in. It was real heavy burlap and that's what we'd get. They bought those, then we'd just rip them open and tie a quarter inch rope on each corner and down to, and we used those with ten pounds of sand on for drift chutes. You know, what you're using for streamers today. We used those for years, we use them for drift chutes, we also used them to drop the firepacks on and all kinds of other cargo. Just a multitude of things that, especially small articles. And then we got, getting into the surplus military canopes, 24's and 28's.

For cargo?

For cargo, yeah. And Frank Derry also made up the, I don't know whether you have any of them here yet today. Probably do around somewhere, but, where the cargo bag and the whole thing is attached to the lower end of the lines on the cargo chute, so when you pack the cargo chute, why, you just go right down the line with rubber bands around it, you know, and stuck them into the sack. And to make it easier on people picking them up in the field, why, there's an extension on the inside of the sack that pulled out, so fellows out in the field, they could kind of cord the lines up and then run the canope and everything back in there, but they had more room, then, if they weren't experienced in packing parachutes, why, it's hard for them to get all that, all those lines and that canope back in there.

So when did you go to military surplus?

Well, it was right, almost during the first of the war, because, like, in 1941 when I was out here, we didn't have enough equipment to go around for our... for the 21 man crew with all of the equipment from Winthrop and what they had here in Montana.

You didn't have enough chutes, then?

No, and so at that time, we were still using the Eagle parachute as a backpack and also Eagle parachutes for chest
packs. So there was a 30 foot backpack and a 27 foot chest pack. Now, before smokejumping, the 27 foot chest pack was normally a back pack for these professional jumpers, that's what they used is a 27 foot instead of a 30 foot, 30 foot was built up to especially accommodate smokejumping.

KM Why is that?

FL Well, for heavier weights and for jumping into timber. And also for higher altitudes. They were also reinforced several places around the canopy, so it just wouldn't tear all the way through them. But that's one thing that made it so hard opening was that extra size on and it really, they really blew open. But a 27 foot, and that's what I used in 1941, made up a 27 foot then into a backpack, that's what I used for my backpack and then I had an old surplus 28 foot urban canopy that I put into a... for my emergency pack.

KM Oh, so you had three chutes?

FL No, I only had two, but there wasn't enough 30 foot canopies to go around for the crew, so I made up the 27 for myself. I jumped out several times and as far as I'm concerned, it was a, just a supreme parachute, the 27 foot.

KM Better than the 30 foot?

FL Yeah, and I'd always, and I'll bet if the war hadn't come along, we'd probably change back to 27 because they open easier and they were much more steerable. Especially for, well, I weighed probably 160 pounds then, and... but man, I jumped up there around some fires and also at high altitudes and you did, really, much better than the 30 foot canopies.

KM And it didn't, you didn't descend too fast with it?

FL No, no it was actually far less concern, it was just as slow or slower than a 30 foot and I don't know why it should be either.

KM So what, you talking about exits and hookups, how'd you do that in the beginning? How did that develop?

FL Well, of course, the first in 1940 while we were still using rip cord and so our exit-

KM You'd get out on the edge of the airplane?

FL Yeah, some of the airplanes had a bar, some of the airplanes, especially the forest-owned Stinson had a strut that came right down in front of the door. So they just taped a bar right on there that you'd get out there and get a hold of and you got out on a step and hung onto that and then you could just drop right straight off, which is real nice. And after that, after we went into Travelaires and Fairchilds and Fords and things like
that, why, then there was no bar or anything there, you just went out the side of the door.

KM Did you... was there a step or...?

FL Yeah, there was usually a step, yeah.

KM Did you stand out there?

FL No, we never did stand out there. Most of the time we just set in the door like we do now, I think, with one foot out on the step. Sometimes there's some of the guys just had both of them out there, you know, but they had to push themselves out, a little bit more difficult, but, for me at least, anyway, I can get out easier with one foot on the step because I could push myself on the door, then.

KM Yeah. And did you hook up to it, was there a cable?

FL Yeah there was, yes. Now in the Travelaires, the cable came from the back, from in back of you. If you were sitting in the door and facing out, your cable is hooked back here and it come out here just a single cable and then you hooked into the end of it. Have you seen these hondos they put in ropes or in lasso ropes?

KM Oh yeah.

FL Well, that's what was into the cable and you hooked your snap into that and just dropped it down beside you, but you're only making one that jump at a pass on account of that. Until... I was up here at Nine Mile and that was in 1941, yes, and Glenn Smith and Chet Derry and myself, we'd been working in the loft pretty hard. In fact, I was doing most of the rigging and Chet was still working on equipment, I guess. But Frank, unbeknownst to us, had invited a bunch of people out there to see a jump and so he said, "Well, you three guys can go jump" and he figured, he didn't say anything about these people watching or anything and so going from the camp, about five miles around there is where the airport is, and somebody said, "Well, if we all hook onto that line at once, and we can go to 5000 feet, we'll get a longer ride out of it." And we used to do a lot of jumping at 5000 feet with ripcords and-

KM And why can't you do it with making one pass?

FL Well, at that time, we only had one place to hook up, but we said, well, now the first guy going out hooks into the end of the hondo, thimble, some people call it. Then the next two guys hook on, right on the cable behind him, why it can't go out over the first snap and we talked it over, Dick Johnson, who was a pilot and he said it was fine with him, looked OK. That's what we did and we went to five thousand feet instead of 3300 or whatever we were supposed to go, but I guess Frank was there explaining to these people what was going on and something was going what he
was talkin' about. [laughs] We went to 5000 feet and I don't think we even dropped the streamers, just so we were sure we didn't use up a lot of extra time, you know.

KM Oh yeah, you didn't have enough fuel?

FL Well, no, it wasn't fuel, but we said, "Well, it won't take us any longer to go to 5000 feet than it would to make three passes around here while we're doing all this dropping and dropping streamers. Not streamers, at that time, it was drift chutes. And so here we go, we're just boiling around up there and got up to 5000 feet and the next thing, bing, bing, bing, the three of us went out the door and three parachutes opened, there was no drift chutes, no nothing. Here he's trying to explain to these people what was supposed to happen, nothing happened like that. Well, I forget, these other two guys were just a little heavier than me and they got to playing around and chasing each other and I was kind of hanging out there by myself, so I was really working to get down to that spot. These other two guys got to playing and forgot where they were and the wind took them off quite a little ways. Well, that wasn't good either, it wasn't what Frank had said was gonna happen. Well, I managed to get into the spot and these two guys, they were way off below me somewhere. He was sure mad, but at that time, then, why, that's when we converted to more than one people to a pass. After he cooled off, why, he could see there was some good came out of it, anyway, even if he couldn't explain everything that went on, but—[laughs]

KM It wasn't the Forest Supervisor; or something more to that?

FL Well, I can't remember, it was, they was always having people out around there, you know, and trying to sell the program and things like that Frank was quite a showman anyway, in his professional days. Well, he was gonna tell all these people what was goin' on and nothing happened like it was supposed to. So that was one of the times then when they decided well, at least two at a time can get out, so after that, even in the training, then, why, it was two-man passes, at least.

KM What about the spotting itself, spotting technique, is that a...

FL I don't think that's changed over the years. Of course, it changes a little bit, primarily in communications, I think, between the pilots and the spotter. Mostly all radio now, I think, but in those days, why, it was all hand signals and you had to have a clear way between you and the pilot. Normally the pilot was, of course, on the left side and you was working out of the right side of the airplane.

KM And they had to look back.

FL Yeah, they had to sit back there and watch you. And you had a, you'd either go this way or that way, you know, move them over
this way and that way and then when you was ready to go, why, you'd just hand signal like that and chucked it and he'd pull the throttles back and you'd feel this airplane, kind of, nose down and start to settle and that's when the guys got out, then. Those hand signals, I don't think there is probably any used today in these aircrafts. I used them, in fact, I've never spotted any with this fancy equipment they have now, mine was all hand signals and things like that. Of course, the cargo dropping at that time was all hand signals that mostly the pilot gave you the signal when to drop it, because he was usually watching out of his window here and usually the cargo dropper was back of his cargo, couldn't see out, but he'd set there and watch the, the pilot.

KM Did you develop the drift chute thing?

FL Well, no, that was the, that burlap was developed or used over there in Region 6 mostly, as far as I know. But it wasn't long after that till we went to a little, probably about three foot square of... oh, some of this cotton cloth. We actually started out with linen, I think, because it wasn't too expensive in those days, but linen and linen lines on the parachute, but it was only about three feet wide. I forget what we put... quarter pound of sand in a little sack or something for weight and there were, it didn't take up so much room, but they were pretty easily lost, you know, if you had to make a little extra wide circle or something or smokey or hazy or something like that, a lot of times, you'd lose them. We always like to have the jumpers watch 'em, too, and of course, they lost 'em, why... but the 7x7 burlap was about the same even as big as it was. Many times you'd lose it...

KM With the color-

FL And background and things like that, so when the streamers came out and then they went through three different colors and things like that. A lot of these things came out in these inter-regional meetings then, you see, that we were having.

KM And the streamers were made of cotton or something?

FL No, they were paper just like they are now.

KM And the, the whole thing, the whole slap out and just slap the first person out, same as it is now?

FL No change today.

KM And how about, when did you get to wearing a spotter's chute or...?

FL Well, we always wore spotter chutes.

KM You always did.
Yeah, even when I started in, we had this V-8 which is almost my private parachute. And for years the, the people in the upper offices were very apprehensive were very apprehensive yet about jumping. They just didn't like anybody else they didn't have a lot of faith in, jumping people and things like that. So many times that over there in my region there now, why it was my job, I did every bit of that, training and all. And I got so that I did train other fellows kind of on the side and broke them in, but I didn't tell anybody else because just so they would know in case I ever got laid up or something, why, somebody could go ahead and... but, these fellows were qualified and we slowly, slowly developed more people. That was one of the reasons for quite a long time that they couldn't develop enough people, well, like in this region, to help do their training and that's why... I came over here for several years and for two or three years... probably more than that, we just brought our entire crew over here.

Did for training?

Yeah and we combined all these people and also combined all the instructors, see. And each of us took a certain part of the training program. For a year or two there, why, we'd make up a, our training program every year, you see, we'd just throw them away when we got through with them and didn't even think about keeping them and finally we decided, we better just as well keep those and use them year after year, then we don't have to make them up all the time. It was very similar, I trained smokechasers over there, lookouts, and things like that, in the guard schools and I made up my training plans and things like that, you know.

So you were training them in not just smokejumping, but firefighting and-

Yes, the whole shebang, yeah.

...physical fitness?

Yeah. Well, each of us usually had a group of jumpers. We usually took 'em through the whole training session. See, each of us taught, like, firefighting and then pacing and maybe parachute jumping and we also led them out in the calisthenics and things like that.

Oh, you did the whole gambit?

Yeah, then soon as it got a little bigger than that, why, then we either break up into... maybe, you teach two or three different things and we had enough instructors to kind of go around a little more. So... and that was quite a little job, you know, that one man take all his guys through the same entire program from start to finish.

Well, that [inaudible] something. When you were, training, and as well as later, what kind of elevation were you jumping
FL Well, we's always at 2000 feet after got into ripcord, or I mean, static lines.

KM You didn't... out on fire jumps, too, huh?

FL Yeah, for a long time, we stayed at 2000 feet, but I suspect a lot of them got down lower than that and I know that did. But, like, over in our country, now, there are times when we jumped those guys five or six thousand feet, but they would be drifting back to a ridge, you see, we had to drop them way out over a canyon and here there would be five or six thousand feet above the ground and they would drift back into the top of the ridge. Because it's so steep, and especially if you had to fly across the ridge and then you had to stay high enough because when you was coming into the ridge you, if you lost an engine, why, you won't have enough altitude so you could go on over, or turn or whatever and so yet, they had to watch that, but....

KM You had to be pretty accurate with your steering.

FL Yeah, and then the... a lot of times you could fly parallel to bridge, to the ridge and then, but you might be out 5000 feet above the ground out here over the canyon and then let them drift back in, too, depending on the conditions a lot, you know, but....

KM When you started out, what kind of, was there a fire specifications for clothes and gear that you had to carry? Like boots, you had to have boots?

FL No, the White boot that's used today, primarily I think was developed, not developed over there, because I've been wearin' them for years and they were a logging boot that was originally built in Spokane for log drivers that were driving down the St. Mary's River and then to Lake Coeur D'alene, and things like that, here in Idaho. Otto White was the man's name and he was, he hand-built these shoes and it was my old grandad wore an old pair in St. Maries, Idaho.

KM Oh yeah?

FL Yeah, and he told me about those, I run into 'em then, when I came east of the mountains, the local store there handled them. The first pair I bought cost me twelve dollars I talked to a guy here the other day who paid $180 out here. So anyway, I've worn those for years and... but they were new over here, nobody had seen them and they all liked the looks of them, they were a real nice lookin' shoe, anyway, you know. But I'd worn 'em for years over there and finally they kind of caught on here and the fellows started buying them here in Missoula. They got 'em in here somewhere. They had tried quite a few different types of shoes over the years. I think it was equipment development and things like that. But the boot, then, that became pretty well
standard, but they always agreed you should have a heavy logging boot of some type. Especially for ankle protection and then just your general work in the woods, but the... I always wore black jeans and a, had kind of a tan shirt, anyway, because they were heavy. So, over there, why all the jumpers kind of adapted to that. They stag these pants off and black jeans, they were real tough and they wore good. They'd last 'em several seasons if they didn't get careless with 'em or something, you know. That's about the way it was, they didn't necessarily go to tan shirts, but nearly all of them wore these frisco jeans, the black jeans and then these White shoes. I know the White's were pretty well standard over here for a long time, too.

KM Requirement, huh?

FL Well, not necessarily required, but they were, kind of, recommended as the best boot because they did have a good arch in them and good support, and such as that. They looked like they had high heels, but they really don't because the way the shoe was built, you see a long sloping heel from the side, looks like a long heel, but it really isn't.

KM When did you, when did they start getting into fire retardant clothes like, no max, or whatever it was?

FL Well, that's, I can't remember what years it was, but I know we had several pairs sent to us. And the first one, whatever they used for retardant, oh, they just completely deteriorated the cloth. The guys come back half naked, they just ripped out and I thought those guys, the first ones that come back had actually just tried to destroy them, but I took a hold of a piece of that and just practically fell apart and I was surprised. So I don't know what they're using now, whether it's, they're using the type of cloth, that fire retardant cloth now.

KM Well, they're using something called Nomex.

FL Yeah, Nomex, yeah.

KM And then for awhile they were using something that, I think, was carcinogenic, they said, and they treated cotton with it. Now I don't know what this other stuff is.

FL Well, Nomex came into being over there when, of course, that was about the time we started using it in our suits, too. So that somebody, like in an airplane crash, or something like that, on take-off or landing or even landing in a fire or something like that, you have quite a lot of protection.

KM Now, before that, you had, didn't you have some lighter weight suits that were nylon or something and would melt when you [inaudible]?

FL Yeah, we tried those, we went from canvas and this nylon was such a good idea, but the first thing we know, why, we knew the
nylon melted, then, and boy, you get some of that on you and it'd melt on you, real severe burns, so we got rid of that pretty quick.

KM Yeah, I bet.

FL Yeah.

KM Um, how about the hook-up of your risers to your harness, was that a similar [inaudible]?

FL Well, originally it was just harness snaps. That was also developed before the project ended in 1939.

KM They developed, the Derry's developed it, then?

FL Yeah.

KM What did they have to jump with before that?

FL Well, it was all one complete unit. The back pack, and when you packed the parachute you had to get the pack and the whole thing out there on the table and then you had to fold those risers into the inside and they had to be tacked in place, of course, you tack 'em yet today, I think, risers, but they're short. At that time was like say that was a long riser that hit Buzz Derry in the cheek and popped it open. But, there's an old shoemaker there in town, did the sewing for Frank, because he had a harness machine. Frank would take these in there and have 'em kind of tacked together and old Jerry Sullivan would sew them for him there in the evening and they come out then and they put a V-ring up here on the shoulder, on the harness, and then they come down off a short riser and onto just a regular harness snap, that's all they used for several years, too, was that harness snap. And....

KM Just one at the top of the?

FL Yeah, on each side. And then we got to thinking, I think there's one or two of them may have snapped partially open or something, but then we decided well, we better drill that tongue and put a car key through there so you can depress it. You had to pull the key out before you could unsnap. I think that was developed then the next spring, I think that... because over here at Nine Mile, we had one or two cases of... and especially about the same way we used a harness snap on the static line. And we get two or three of those that actually snapped off [inaudible] from the shock.

KM Off, out of the plane?

FL Yeah and guys went out and no hook up. So, however, there was one guy who went out the door with the snap in his hand, too, so....
KM He just forgot.

FL Yeah, he forgot all about it, but that was when they were using... they finally went to overhead cable then like in the... they were in all the aircraft, I think. Fords especially were probably the first and then they put them in the Travelaires as well. And then the Norseman had the overhead cable over there, too. But we had fellows hooked up here and that first guy that went out, he pulled that down and that broke the thread, you know, your tie out there on the parachute, it had a terrific pull on that and would snap and when you come back a lot of times you snap that snap open and the next guy why, of course, he was, if you didn't watch it, it could come right off the line. So that's when they put the car keys in and then it stopped that.

KM Do you ever have any trouble with a cable breaking?

FL No, not, we've never had one, never did. Because they always had the extra heavy cables in there, anyway, and that aircraft cable is real strong. Anytime it got one broken wire in it, why, it was replaced, you didn't fool with it. Normally, they had spares of every airplane, anyway, so we could replace them right there at the base if we wanted to.

KM Now, were these planes contract as they are now?

FL Well, the Travelaires and Fords from Missoula were contract. But our aircraft there in Region-6 were government-owned. They were Noorduyn-Norseman and they were surplus first-aid aircraft, Red Cross. They still had the red cross on them. They were Canadian-made, but they were using to pick up... oh, stretcher cases and things like that, they still had racks in them to hold, probably about three stretchers on each side, and then they used them a lot for personnel transfer in the military, that is, hauling some of the big shots around, or something like that. But they were a pretty heavy, bulky airplane, but I really liked them. They were very stable and pretty powerful, but they were pretty slow, too. They were more of a bush plane from north, Canada, and there are still a lot of 'em in use up there yet. But there's a... bush pilots use and take stuff back in the... especially up in the Ontario country where they have lots of lakes and then they're on pontoons.

KM Oh.

FL They'd carry off a load and it didn't seem to make much difference in....

[END OF SIDE A]

[BEGIN SIDE B]

FL Doing a lot of yacking.

KM It's good stuff.
FL Well, anyway, they were kind of compared to a bumble bee, you know, dynamically they're not supposed to be able to fly, and that's about the way the Norseman was, but it flew. They were very solid-built. A lot of people didn't like 'em because they were so heavy. Of course, the fellows over here, they're used to these smaller, well, they weren't really smaller, they haul just about as many people, but they were a lighter aircraft like the Travelaire. Those Fords are pretty heavy, but they were a much bigger airplane, too.

KM Yeah. Now all those were single engine?

FL Yes, well the Travelaire and the Norseman.

KM And the Ford's a Trimotor?

FL Yes, Ford was a Trimotor, yeah.

KM When, is the single engine, was that a problem ever?

FL Not with us, we had never had any trouble over there, they were just top maintenance on them, too. Over there the government had their own shop and own mechanics, and things like that, and boy, if anything went wrong, they flew them right up there, or we flew the airplane in and had it... but they always had an extra one on there at the shop so it'd go either direction, or it was used also after we got a little fire bust, why, they could bring the other airplane up and have two airplanes going. Because you could only fly... haul four people at a time. And of course, the Travelaire, you could only really only haul two. I was just talking to one of the fellows out here yesterday, the first jumpers we put on a fire in 19, well it was 1941 up here at Fish Creek, head of Fish Creek, on the Lolo Forest, out at Nine Mile. They hauled them up there in the Travelaire. At that time, why, they insisted that Frank Derry go along and check out the spotters. So I was a spotter, but there right on top of the ridge was kind of a meadow and Bob was telling me yesterday, he remembered hanging up in the tallest tree in that meadow and here he had meadow all around him, but that was the one, too, where the grasshoppers got in with the silk canopy and chewed it full of holes, took us quite awhile to figure out until we found some grasshoppers wrapped up in it. You know, they kind of spit out of the ground, juice out of the grass, too, we found some of that on them, but they actually would chew holes in them, eat holes in them, I guess.

KM While you were on the fire?

FL Yeah, I was on the ground.

KM So what did you do to remedy that?

FL Well, we just tried to get them up off the ground as quick as they could, it was, you left them laying there in the grass,
why, you know, those grasshoppers are gonna crawl into them. And then they'd roll them up and not check them either, they didn't know anything about it. So they'd have to shake them out and make sure there was no grasshoppers in it. They never did bother the nylon after we got into nylon, but, they didn't like that.

KM When did you get into nylon?

FL Well, it was during the war, I can't remember what years they were cuz those old Eagles went on for quite awhile, around '40, see, I imagine '44 or '45 we must have been getting in the nylon, I can't remember for sure. But then, you see, at that time we had to, to kind of rebuild them to do our job [inaudible], put the slots in them. Then their came the tails and things like that, FS-1's and I made the, the experimental jump on the first slotted chute up at Seeley Lake.

KM Oh really? How did that do?

FL Well, that was quite an experiment that was the experiment with a chute and also with the big radio that they wanted to try out, see if it would stand the landings, and things like that. Tied along the leg. It was quite a wind and I hit the ground pretty hard and into a log and end over end, I could just hear that radio, sounded like it was just grinding to pieces, you know, rattling and banging. And I got up and hooked that thing up and it worked. Yeah, and everything was shaked loose inside, but it all must have stayed hooked together or something.

KM So that was the instatement of the radio, visa radio?

FL Yeah. Well, no, we used a radio over there in 1940 and we had gotten some that was just about the same size as cigarette cartons. And we had, I think, a couple of them. But I don't know whatever become of them. We tried them out on a couple of fires, you know, they worked pretty good, but for some reason, it took them years to come back to that size radio, and I don't know why. Because the one I tried over here then was that great big one. They used to have what they call the SPF sets and they would take, probably 30, 40 pounds of batteries in those, you know, to make them operate. They had boxes, big boxes and the radio itself wasn't all that big, but it took a tremendous amount of battery power to run. What time is your lunch time?

KM Oh it's, it doesn't matter, I'm not eating here, anyway.

FL Oh that's right. Well, anyway, it took a long time before we got back to these little radios like they're using now.

KM Yeah.

FL And I don't know why it was because they were developed at that time.

KM Sometimes things work backwards.
Well, a lot of it was financing at that time, I think, that, you know, they had telephones strung all over the back country, I think, in this area as well as over there, but that was communications that you could get to normally from trails and things. Nearly every main trail had a telephone line up to lookouts and a... trail crews and things like that.

And a telephone hookup and then you call the lookout or something?

Yeah, you could call the lookout or a lot of places you could clear into the Ranger District Headquarters. They were old one line telephones, but they worked real good.

I guess they removed most of those, haven't they?

Yeah, that's all, in fact, we've done a lot of that over there, nearly all of it in backcountry in the wilderness area. We've jumped jumpers in there on the end of the line and then they'd roll it up and leave it along the trails and packers would come along and pick it up, then. Once in awhile you'll see insulators hung up back there yet, you know, where the old lines were.

So that's, okay, keep my eye out for them.

Yeah. They, like on the main trails, you're liable to see, or you'll see blazes up on the side of the tree where they stapled it in or might be a blaze down on the side, too, where they first marked out there telephone lines. There was somebody usually go through and just go from tree to tree, you see, and they'd have to swing back and forth to keep them free and use out over the trail. Some of them up pretty high in trees.

That's a ways to hike in just to string a line.

Yeah. Well, but they were used then and especially in a fire. In the early days of the Forest Service, why, fire was kind of a leading... instead of engineering or anything like that, fire kind of had precedence over anything else.

Over timber?

Yeah, oh yeah. And finally timber kind of took over, fire stayed in the back seat and engineering and they've all had their, now I guess they're all pretty well even, I don't know. At that time, anyway, fire had quite a lot of priority.

Did you work year round, then?

No, that was in the early part of the... the only person to work year round at that time was the District Ranger.

Oh yeah?
Yeah, he had to do all of his own book work in the wintertime. Summertime, and that, was the fire season, that you went out and opened up the trails, fixed up the telephone lines, and then the lookouts went up and the fire guards went on their stations.

About June?

Yeah, usually sometimes in March and April, depending on the snow conditions, sometimes they'd have drift fences to fix up like in the horse pastures. Like, in our forest there, why, we had 100, around 180 head of horses and mules that would go [inaudible]. And, of course, they was all primarily for fire, and so early in the spring, why, some of the, [inaudible], and such as myself and some of the other fellas there, would be out fixing these drift fences so they'd turn these horses and mules out on the pasture. Get them off of the hay, they'd been fed all winter. And then they usually, we'd have to go in and open up all of the trails, sheep driveways. Fix up the telephone lines, and get them all repaired [inaudible] to each lookout and pretty soon you go back and put the lookouts on. I was a smokechaser there during the summer, so I had a big area to keep the telephone lines up and shape and haul food back and forth to the lookouts, and my pack horse, and such as that.

So you, it was your job to supply lookouts every...?

Yeah, about, at least once a month. At that time, why, a lookout went up there for, usually from the first of July to maybe the middle of September and then they'll come down. Usually once a month, you made a trip in there with pack string. Took in what they needed which had to last them another month, but you had several of these lookouts so you had to make a rotation on them so that... in your area, why, you kept them supplied.

Now did they contact the base by telephone?

Yes, each lookout had a telephone.

They didn't use the radio system?

No, they didn't have any radios then till they got they SPF sets. And then they, sometimes when they got a fire then, why then they'd put one of these SPF sets on to a lookout and then he'd kind of be a center of communications for the fire, of any size. Then they'd usually have a radio or two around on the fire. But they almost had a radio man and he did nothing else but run the radio, such as that.

They didn't have repeaters or?

No, nothing like that. And it took, I don't know, 60, 70 feet of aerial with a big coil in the middle of it on those old radios. You had to have them out in the open and so high and
pretty stiff specifications on it. But we dropped those around finally enough, we got into the airplane business pretty good, why we'd drop those around. We'd usually pump up an innertube and put under them, you know, so they'd bounce around a little bit, but they usually...

KM Be OK?

FL Yeah, be able to shake them up. Especially if you could get them out on the flat, usually pretty careful where we tried to put them but... they were pretty expensive at that time, you know, hard to replace.

KM Must be something to pack out.

FL Oh they were, they were just about one side pack for a horse, total, with batteries.

KM So, when you... did you... you had people come in to do, to... other jumpers or something would come in with a pack string to help you pack out?

FL No, normally the... when we first started using the jumpers, why, usually the Ranger District was responsible for sending the pack string in and whatever was needed to pack the jumpers out. I think that was pretty much standard all over the regions that used jumpers at that time. But over in our area, a lot of it's so hard to get into that they're pretty reluctant to send pack horses in there and so our business kind of dropped off. That's when I said, "Well, you guys can leave anything out of that pack you want that is too heavy as long as you put the fire out, but you're gonna bring your parachutes and, especially your parachutes, and your jump equipment back." Any fire tools, they could leave their fire tools on the trail if they wanted to, but...

KM And then someone would come by...?

FL Yeah, and the district was going by there, why they'd pick them up, they didn't have to make a special trip. And our business picked right up then when they found out they didn't have to go all this extra trouble to. It was about as simple for them just to go ahead and send somebody in there as long as they had to, you know, make a special effort. At that time, we weren't too plush on equipment anyway. We steadily got it built up just so that we had extra equipment, so that... but we never did leave any out there, anyway. I sent some guys back once or twice and that was all that took. They saw that they got their equipment out. So we finally got equipment built up to where we could leave a lot of the repair work for winter work then. Keep these guys stabilized and was also training them on repair work, complete their riggers in training and things like that, especially the squad leaders.

KM And about that time, the budget started developing a little
better?

FL Yeah, it got a little better all along then. Especially when they got these inter-regional meetings and the Washington office, was interested in them and, most of them insisted then that we not use any of these, surplus equipment because even if it was just brand new, why, if something happened, why, it wasn't good publicity. So in the... got into the contracting [interruption]... and they'd buy all the equipment, parachutes and things like that, that we needed. We gradually got built up then to where we had just a good inventory of equipment. Both the parachute and firefighting equipment, and such as that.

KM And that was about, you had about how many people?

FL Well, we got up around fifty people there at the, at the inner city. And I think that... well, the Region-1 here, I think, probably up close to two hundred at some of the times, too. That [inaudible] slowly dropped off, too, now to where they're way down again.

KM Region-1 meaning Missoula?

FL Missoula, yeah.

KM Had two hundred people?

FL I think it was up pretty close to that and maybe more, a few times, I can't remember. But see, ours was divided over there that we had some fifty there at North Cascades and then they'd have some down on the Siskiyou and they built up a LeGrande base. So, they had a large number of jumpers but they were stationed around in different areas.

KM Well, when did you see that... the use of helicopters for pack outs?

FL Well, actually we started out in 1948.

KM Oh really.

FL The first helicopter we used over there and it was on account of the flood conditions there in 1948, it washed out so many trails and things like that, that they were very low capacity helicopters. They could maybe bring one man off at, say up around 7000 feet, they could bring one man off the ground. Then they'd go back and get the other and then they'd go back and get borrowed equipment. Make three or four trips, but still it was faster, if you needed the people, to get your people and equipment back in to business. And we had, we actually did a little experimenting for them there in 1948, about low level jumping from the aircraft. [Which is what] what they wanted to use in California, so we used some of the jumpers there. And they used that... oh, I don't know how many, maybe three or four years down in California, where they have the heavy brush condition,
they fly low.

KM How low?

FL Oh, right on top of it practically. Six feet. I think they may have got up to maybe fifteen feet in some. Where they had lots of real heavy brush.

KM And then they'd, they'd drop somebody out?

FL Yeah, they'd just jump off the skid.

KM Oh.

FL Hang out there on the side. Oh, they'd practically hover right there. But we practiced with it right there on the field to see how fast you could get out of one, and how high, and things like that. That you could get out, kind of... well, safely, you know. But they used regular smokejumper suit and helmet and the whole thing.

KM And they just did a roll when they...?

FL Yeah. If they could roll in that brush. Normally, about all they had was... some of that brush was so heavy, they just, kind of, double up and bounce into a like a spring, or something.

KM Many injuries from that?

FL None that I know of. We didn't have any and we just jumped right onto the bare ground there. But, kind of used to it anyway, you know, our training... jumping for landings and things like that.

KM Now, what kind of roll were you doing?

FL Well, at that time, actually we were just doing anything to get off their feet. And then gradually went through and after the... some of the paratroopers came back. Think some of the marines that were jumpers, and things like that, they brought in some military types of rolls and things like that, but... Everybody tried them, I think, for a good long time. I think it finally ended up, we just went back to gettin' off your feet and, you know. Because due to these twisting rolls, and things like that, you might get some sprained ankles out of it or your feet would hang up in the dirt, or rocks, and you'd twist and try to get over on your shoulder, your hip and your shoulder. I don't know what they're using now, I haven't been really around them at all. Of course, most of the time now, they... I think the present equipment lets them down so easy anyway that they... hard to get out a roll anyway, isn't it?

KM It's like my elbow there, that's from doing a bad roll, but most of the time we land pretty soft. Now they, for awhile they were doing a shoulder roll over the...?
FL Yeah, bring left hip over your right shoulder?

KM Yeah, that was complicated.

FL Yeah. For quite awhile, yeah. It was hard people to get themselves coordinated to do that. And they may be concentrating on that and not watching what they're doing and they could hurt. Because that canopy never did always turn you loose like you thought it was going to, you know.

KM Once you got it on the ground?

FL Yeah. So that's, as far as I know, I know we did that for a long time... at least when... well we just said, "Well, get off your feet anyway you can. Get over onto your side or roll or whatever." And it seemed to have a lot better luck that way.

KM Rather than specifying.

FL But I think this equipment now that I've seen, why, they don't hardly touch the ground.

KM Did you see these square chutes just now?

FL No, but I have seen them. They land and run and things like that.

KM Yeah, land on one foot.

FL But if they're out there in the rocks, it might be a little different. Especially if a wind or thermal let them down, or something like that.

KM Yeah, that's right. Well, you must be seeing a lot of old friends from the reunion.

FL Oh yeah. Yeah, and there are a lot of them that, you know, that passed through my base, and I've been over here so many times, that I knew a lot of faces and put over 30 years... well, it's more than that now. I've been out of it for twelve years. But over a period of... almost 33 years that I was in the business, that I met all these people. Of course, over the years, they change. Like the fellas in the '41 crew. They had to come up and introduce themselves. I could remember them perfectly, what they looked like then. But now it's a lot different. And I know if I hadn't had a sign on me, they wouldn't know me, either.

KM That's pretty amazing. You get some good stories out of that, I bet.

FL Yeah.

KM Well, when you were doing the cargo runs, what... [it] seems
to me I remember something about; first cargo runs were without any kind of chute, or hook it up or anything, and then eventually they got to hooking up, in the plane, and then eventually beyond that they went to parachutes, is that right?

FL You mean-

KM For cargo.

FL For the spotter?

KM Yeah, for the one... the kicking the cargo.

FL Yeah, a lot of times... see, it originally started out with these seat backs and they could be dangerous. Because you had the rip cord up here, but you had your pins and everything down here, and they could hook up on cargo, or walls or anything like that. Than when they got the... so I know a lot of times, why, I'd ride in an airplane in a seat pack, but when I'd go to dropping cargo, I'd fold that up and get it back out of the way, but I had myself tied in with a safety line. You know, something you'd lean up against and hold you in, in case you didn't... get shook loose or something. But we had those safety lines and then, we even used those with the chutes after we went back to wearing parachutes. But this B-8 pack was the first one, then, that we really used and...

KM For cargo?

FL For spotters and for cargo droppers.

KM Now, was that the 27 foot?

FL Yeah, that was, it was a 27 foot Eagle parachute. Because they were so fast opening. That was about the time we started having these interregional meetings, too. We all agreed that that's what we should be using because you'd go from one place to another, then, why, we could have equipment. The same equipment.

KM Did you do your own, you took your own chutes with you, then, when you went to different places?

FL Ah usually, we took a lot of them, but then we got to just taking one round. So you make one round in case you wanted to jump en route to another base, or something like that. Sometimes before you get in, why, they would call you and say, "Well, go over here and jump on that fire." And on the way in, guys suit up in the airplane. But after that... well, that's the reason then, that we got so that the... build all the equipment standard. Our fire packs were pretty much standard, tools. If my crew came over here, they jumped their outfits first and then [when] they come back, why, they could either jump extra suits out of here, or harnesses, or canopies or whatever. Same, use the same methods, pretty much the same training plans, and such as that. I suppose it's all the same yet, I don't know.
Yeah, I guess in many ways. Of course, they're going to square chutes now in Alaska. Which is somewhat different. Did you... you had the spotter's check and, you know, like they do today? A spotter will come around and check you?

Oh yeah.

What was your getaway time?

Our getaway time there, at Vader City Airport, was about, averaged about nine minutes from the time we got the report till they were in the air.

And you had a siren?

Siren and the whole... I'd usually blow the siren and while I was taking down the information on the fire, guys were suited up. Usually a squad leader would come in and get the fire information location and all of that, go back out. Then... and check his jumpers. As they're getting in the airplane, and get in. The airplane would already be fired up. We had everything right there so close, see, and I had my spotters office right there, or my dispatcher's office, so that I could look out the window and see if there was anything going wrong either, you know. I could also check what was going on. Well, everybody, I think, really liked that, they didn't waste any time getting suited up, and getting in the airplane and getting going. One reason for that, I could really never find out any reason why we shouldn't go fast, you know. The other thing is that, you get into a fire bust and before the end of the day is over, you can get way behind. And you just keep wasting time, why, pretty soon, you're not doing everything that should be done for the day. That went for cargo dropping and dropping hot meals, or whatever, too. If they said they wanted it at one o'clock, they got it at one o'clock, and there was no fooling around. So that... it seemed that, I think, a lot of people didn't think, "Well, they didn't need to move that fast." "Well... lots of times. But I learned that early in the fire game, that you can get way behind pretty quick. On supplies... if you got a crew out there depending on you to feed them for the night, or something, or give them tools or beds or something, why, you know, that's not good.

Plus I guess Washington was looking at you, at how fast you could respond to a fire.

I don't know how they were looking at me, I didn't care. Because I... that was the way I wanted to operate and nobody ever said. "Well, you can't do that." "Well, lots of times that I would have jumpers out on patrol during a lightning storm and they'd be out on a fire before the thing was ever reported. And you know, that backfired a few times. Not that it wasn't good, but the Washington office, and those that reviewed those fire reports, come back to the district, "Well, how can you have a man, a fire
manned, before its reported?" See, normally, they had a report
time and from the lookout to a District, and on in like that, and
then to the one that was going to the fire.

KM So, usually they were spotted by the lookout?

FL No, we'd even... we picked up a lot of them from the jump
airplane. Because when there's a storm going on, why, these guys
would be circling right behind that storm, they'd see the
lightning hit. Why, it started a fire, they just went over and
put a couple jumpers on it right now. Then they'd report it to
the District. We had what we kind of call the automatic
dispatch, there at our base. And it was, if we heard a fire
being reported, we just automatically suited up and took off...
for the fire. And that was all agreed between the jumper Base
and the Rangers. And/or the other forests that were adjacent to
us. So we had men going to that fire right now. Then, a lot of
times, why, the District wouldn't say a word. We picked it up,
they'd just call and ask me, "Did you get that?" and I'd tell
them, "Yeah." That's all there was to it. Then the spotter, he'd
report to them right where it was, and fire conditions, and how
long is it should take these guys. Give them all the information
they wanted, right there.

KM You didn't have to have fire orders?

FL No. You didn't fool with that. All that paperwork, I don't
see how they can get on a fire anymore.

KM No, it's hard.

FL But everything is made up, as soon as the spotter got back,
why, they made out their reports. If they didn't, they had it
all in their notebook anyway and they could make it up at the end
of the day or... but there in 1970, they was just going day and
night putting jumpers on fire, and they just had notebooks full
of stuff. Make out their reports. Usually they come in and call
the District first thing, so that they could talk right direct to
the District Dispatcher, as the squad leader. I didn't have
anything between me and them, or anybody that... they just went
from one-to-one right now. And they got their instructions right
from the horse's mouth. There was no... no chance for foul-ups
or anything like that.

KM So it was pretty easy for them to talk to the District's?

FL Oh, yeah. We had a real good rapport with the Districts and
the Forest. Same with the area reconnaissance and things like
that. They just had it set up, we just automatically did it. And
they would report to the Districts as they flew around. The same
with the smokejumper patrol, that, they were on the District,
why, they reported to the... your District Dispatcher. Or, if he
wasn't there, they check in with each lookout as they went by.
Which they did anyway. And just, more or less, to... well, a
lookout job is kind of lonesome anyway, you know, it gives the
lookout something to do and they know they're part of the outfit then. Out directing that airplane and people in it.

KM  So lookouts were usually, if they spotted a fire, they would contact the District?

FL  Yeah, they would usually call on the district and say, "Well, we gotta fire." And I'd just blow the siren and they'd load up and take off because... well, I just knew the country and where it was and where they're talking about. And they'd just head for that area.

KM  You didn't have to get the coordinate [inaudible]?

FL  Didn't fool with it. Most of the time the lookouts... a lot of them really couldn't give you a good description right where it was, you know. So the Districts really depended on the squad leaders, then, of giving an accurate description of right where it was. The township, range, and section. And how to get to it, if they wanted to, or whatever. They got all their fire conditions, just exactly what the fire was doing. Because these fellows... time that... they've been on a lot of fires and they've... and in the fall, I had them doing all kinds of timber sale work and all over the country, so that they knew all the fire conditions out there on... timber types and ground fuel types and things like that. And they had a real excellent background there to, you know, to give information right directly to the Ranger District. Because so many new lookouts, they see a fire over there and it smokes up a little bit, why, they get all excited, and then the Dispatcher gets excited and the Forest Dispatcher gets excited, you know.

KM  And they just find out it's fog, huh?

FL  Well, there might be a pitch log burning. You know, giving a lot of smoke or something. But they... the District depended a lot on the... and so did the other Forests, that, when these fellas went out there and there was one thing I give, all inter-forest meetings or anything, I always took these guys with me.

KM  All the jumpers?

FL  Yeah, well, the squad leaders. So they could meet these Dispatchers and get on there... they'd say, "Well, you guys aren't qualified." And I'd show them right on the records how much fire experience that these fellows had.

KM  They're not qualified for what?

FL  They said, "Well, maybe you're not qualified." They think their lookouts are more qualified than these guys. And these guys are right over the fire and look right at it and their lookout might be looking ten miles away, or something, see. And also, they have lots of new people and they don't know fire conditions. So it, gradually there they just really depended on
these guys getting the... with that information. And they're all qualified Division Bosses, and things like that, that they could go and take charge of a fire for a Forest if they wanted it, at least temporarily.

KM Oh really, for the summer, kind of like?

FL Well, not for the summer, but I mean on an individual fire, if they had a fire going that they needed a large crew on, well, these fellas were capable of being a Fire Boss until they could get Fire Boss people in there.

KM Was there much rivalry between, let's say, lookouts and smokejumpers or...?

FL Well, there were kind of at one time, but by the time we got through... like, these guys going around talking to these lookouts, and things like that, why, I don't think there's any rivalry, it was more of a friendship, you know. A part of the crew, or part of the outfit. And invariably when the lookouts come off in the fall well, he was down there meetin' all these guys, things like that, you know. Oh, it was just, you know, you kind of had to work at it to get the people to get together. People don't get together very good, you know.

KM Yeah, spread apart like that, too.

FL Yeah.

KM So you got, maybe, half of your fires from patrol flights and chasing lightning storms?

FL Probably, yes. A good half of them.

KM Yeah. I was going to ask you about if you come across anymore stories and things like that from talking with some of the people who jumped in the '40's and... since you've been here?

FL Well, I talked with Fred Brauer and he was talking about a bear story up here at the Nine Mile Camp that... well, it was a fella that was one of the jumpers there, in that 1941 crew. And he'd hid a little bear down here in a park one time it was in a cage or something. He was a professional, or he was a college wrestler. And so he said, "Well, you guys catch me a bear and I'll wrestle him." He was a big husky Dutchman, and so we had a ball game going on down there and somebody looked up and here's these two bears come walking in the camp, going into where the garbage cans were. So, boy, we dropped the ball game and all gathered out there and told this, Nussbacher [Kari]. He said, "Come on Nuss", he says, "I'm gonna catch you a bear." And then we got up there and pretty soon those bears kind of woke up and one of the little black fellas, he took off just like a shot and he went right up through the whole crew and run for the hill. The other was a great big brown one, and he didn't... he just kind of ambled along there, he went by a great big chokecherry
bush. It'll take a car to knock that thing down, he just walked by it and he just flattened that, just with one swipe of his paw. And this Nussbacher stopped a little bit then, I said, "Come on, Nuss," and so we went over a little farther. That bear stood up on his hind feet and turned around facing us and he just shook his claw, paws at us like that, and he gnashed his teeth. They just click real loud, if you ever hear a bear gnashing his teeth. And then the hair on his neck would run up and down, you know, just like a... well, kind of like feathers almost, and so Noose kind of got the point there and the fight was over.

KM Without even beginning.

FL Yeah. Oh, it was a tremendous big old brown bear. The way he just flattened that one bush that... you know, I think he knew what was going on, or he knew somebody wanted to challenge him, or he wanted to challenge somebody. Anyway, that fight was over. And then another time we got a... caught a little bear there in the garbage can. We heard that they... well, you get one on a rope, why, they're terrible hard to handle. So we run ropes from each side of the building and around the can and when we got a hold of him, why, he choked right down and we thought we's gonna kill him. Had to run out there and get him loose before... but...

KM Give him CPR. Well, do you have anything more that you could think of?

FL I don't know what. You'll just have to ask the questions, I'll probably think of a lot of things time, I get back home, but I can't remember what we discussed in the other...

KM Yeah, I don't think we, I don't think we've done anything twice, but I'm sure we could talk for hours.

FL Well, thirty years of experience, and then it's a... of course, twelve years since I've been away from it, but it's kind of almost slipped my mind, a lot of it. But a lot of it comes back kind of slow.

KM Right, there's quite a time there, yeah. Talk much with Earl Cooley?

FL Yeah, just a little bit, course he was busy over there selling his book, so I didn't get to talk to him much.

KM Yeah. Great, well it's about the end of the tape, too, so-

FL Well, it comes out even then.

KM Yeah, it comes up just right.

FL [Interruption]... '41 crew, but like I said, I wouldn't a known them if they hadn't come up and introduced themselves, they kind of looked familiar.
KM This is the first time you've seen them?

FL Yeah, some of them since 1941.

KM Really, well that's quite a time.

FL I know they looked me over pretty good, too. I guess because they read my tag and I read their's, I didn't know who they were. So the tags was a pretty good idea.

KM Yeah. I guess somebody came driving in with... in a Mercedes.

FL You mean here?

KM Yeah, to the reunion and gave people quite a shock. [Pause] Well, people seem to be coming from all kinds of professions now. Lawyers and....

FL Yeah, I was talkin' to one of my fellows, he's a lawyer over in Seattle now. And, I forget what year, back in the '50's or '60's, he spent one season with me there and then a couple seasons up in Alaska. He's a lawyer there in Seattle now. Then I've got one fella that's a prosecuting attorney down in Pasco, Washington. And engineers and... well, these guys do a lot of different things.

KM Yeah. Do you have any, what you could say, is one of the best times that you've had as smokejumping, best year?

FL I don't know the... my whole career was the best, I think. I just had so many... I guess maybe all I remember is the good times and I guess the year I would remember most was would be, probably, 1970, which was a big fire year. Like, I'd been telling my crew, one of these years you're gonna get a real bust. And we'd been more or less preparing for that, you know. And the guys... I'd just keep doin' a lot of different things, so they could fill in anywhere. We just got along real good, with all those people comin' in there. And then that's where I started training Bill Moody, too, pretty good, because I knew I was gonna get out of there pretty quick. But the last year, why, practically all I did was kind of herd him around and some of the squad leaders and give them some training because I just didn't like to see anybody else come in from the outside, take the place over. And its a...

KM Well Moody's a good guy.

FL Yeah.

KM Yeah, when was your...?

FL I know, he ought to be, I trained him. [laughs] Yeah, got my licks in somewhere.
KM Yeah. [laughs] When was your last fire jump, do you remember that?

FL Oh, that was on the Dean Creek fire, I think, up here in the Flathead Forest.

KM Oh, was it, out here.

FL Yeah.

KM What year?

FL About 19, I think it was in '41.

KM Oh, it's... the last one was '41.

FL But, you see after... that's why I say, these people here were always... and that's when I took the whole squad on. Then, in '40 of course, why, I was just kind of part of the squad as a jumper and we had a kind of a... kind of a project man there who did the squadding and things like that. In '41, why, I was the squad leader out here and...

KM Now, that was out of Winthrop?

FL No, that was out at Nine Mile. Yeah. And that's when I had the whole squad, you know, and the Big Prairie Squadron on fire up in upper Flathead country. [Pause] Well, that, I was always supposed to go with the whole squad, see, but they said, "Well, there's nobody left there to run that outfit in order to drop cargo and keep the place going." So they stopped that right now. That's what my boss told me, he said, "Well, you can either administer it or jump, one or the other, but not both."

KM Now, who was that, was your boss?

FL Well, it was a fella named Larry Jolly and he was one of the younger, new fire staff men I worked with over there, on the Okanogan.

KM Oh, he wasn't out of Winthrop, then?

FL Yeah, he was, well he was out of the Supervisor's office. But he was kind of in charge of the jumping outfit. Originally, we started out as a... responsible to first the Twisp District, and then we changed up to the Winthrop District, and the fire staff man. Ended up where I was... we were regarded the same as a Ranger District there then. That I was responsibly directly to the Forest Supervisor, the same as a Ranger. But I worked primarily directly with the Fire Staff man. When I'd go [to] Ranger meetings, why, I would deal with all the other Staff man in there, regardless of what they were. If they wanted timber markers, or people to cruise, or scale, or whatever. Why, if someone didn't have them, why, I had these guys trained to do
that. And the same on the Districts. And so we had a real good rapport with all the Ranger Districts and Forest Supervisors Office.

KM You were kind of a team of experts and they would call on you for fires or anything?

FL Yeah, yeah, and if I needed help, why, I went to them. If I had an engineering job that I wanted some information on, I'd go to the Forest Engineer. And he'd either designate one of his men or he'd personally help me, or whatever. And timber jobs or anything like that, why, I'd either deal with the Ranger Direct on it, or else go to the Forest Timberman.

[END OF TAPE]