BB This is Bev Buckner interviewing Bob L. Martin on July 22, 1984 for the Oral History Smokejumper Project. He jumped in 1941.

BB Let me get this... make sure I have it right... you jumped in 1941.

BM Right.

BB O.K. Um, why don't you give me a little bit of a history of what you did before you became a smokejumper.

BM Well, I... I had seven years work in fire suppression for the Forest Service in Swan in the Condon District, Flathead National Forest, on, ah... fighting fire and cutting trails, lookout. I was a lookout fireman several years. And at the time I heard about this parachute deal I was working for the Bureau of Mines over in the Stillwater country out of Absarokee. And I just... I was... I had been attending the School of Mines, and I went broke at the end of the semester and so I got at this job, but I wanted to... it seemed more exciting to get to jump out and parachute. So I went up to the Flathead Forest in Kalispell and got my recommendations and they directed me to go to Ralph Hand at the Federal Building here in Missoula, and Ralph Hand was in charge of recruiting these people for smokejumpers. OK?

BB Yeah. [laughs] What about smokejumping actually got you interested into it? What made you decide you wanted to be a smokejumper?

BM Because I had fought fire for quite a number of years and, ah... and it... it seemed like it would be much more exciting to jump out of an airplane than... to fight a fire than it would be to trudge up the mountain for a day with a pack on your back. It was... it was... I craved excitement at that age.

BB How old were you?

BM I was twenty-four.

BB What year did you start working with the Forest Service? You said you worked seven years prior. [laughs]

BM [laughs] Yeah, well I... I tell you jobs were hard to come by and you had to be eighteen years old and I had to fudge about my age a little bit.

BB Just a little bit.

BM But by the time... I checked it out and I think, by the time that I applied for the smokejumper I changed my age back to where it was right. I... checks out, I think I was actually twenty-
four but there was times when I, ah... well, to start with I was
two years off then a... so I moved it up, and then I'm one year
off and I... I think I was twenty-four when I... when I applied
for the smokejumping job.

BB OK.

BM And when I got in there Ralph Hand told me that I was too
late, that they'd picked twenty-four people out of over 300
applicants. And then, of course, I was greatly disappointed.
But in discussing it afterward he said, "We are trying... we
intend to make parachutists out of firefighters." So I said,
"Well, I got seven years." He looked at me and I... like maybe
[laughs]... maybe I had, or maybe I hadn't. So I got my
recommendations out, [and were from] Henry Thol, was a ranger I
worked for for several years.

BB Henry Throl?

BM Thol, T H O L, was a District ranger, an old time ranger.
And incidentally Henry's son was killed in the Mann Gulch fire,
Henry Thol, Jr.. So anyway, with these recommendations, he read
them and... Ralph did... and he said, "Well I can... I can tell
you this much about it, if you can pass the physical, why, you
will be one of them." So that... from there on that was it.

BB What you going to school for? You said you were going to
school.

BM I was taking mining engineering.

BB So that was college; you were a college man, then started to
jump. [inaudible] OK., and so Henry... er Ralph Hand got you
going on the smokejumping business.

BM Yeah.

BB OK. When... when did you report for training? When were you
accepted?

BM Well, real, real soon because they were already getting
under way, and I think within the next day or so I took my
physical and passed it and went out to the old 3-C camp at Nine
Mile, and I was in. They started training right then.

BB Why don't you tell me a little bit about the training, what
was that like?

BM Well, it was... it was a kind of a fun deal because it,
they... it wasn't highly organized, and we... we kind of learned
as we went along, and if you had any ideas, why, you could try
them. We learned from this experimenting. And they had a few
procedures already worked out and I enjoyed it very much.

BB Was it a lot of physical training?
BM Lots of calisthenics and lots of work to get us in good physical shape. We climbed ropes hand-over-hand, and we practiced lets downs on ropes so when you hung up in a tree you could get down. We jumped out of towers, or off of low towers into the ground, we learned how to land and fall. You'd land on your... you take half the jolt on your feet and then take the rest... take the dive on one shoulder or the other. And we jumped out of towers onto a rope which caught you in midair to simulate the... the jerk you got when the chute opened. That was about it... lots of physical exercise. We... we played lots of volleyball, that was supposed to keep you limbered up. We had none of these work projects that I understand they had years later. We spent our... our time there, all the time. We didn't go out and work on trails or other jobs until we were needed.

BB Was the remount there, you know, with the...?

BM Yes, the remount... that's where they handled all the... this Region-1 had two remounts. One of them permanent, this one out here. And they handled... during the winter months they han... between the two of them they handled all the pack stock, saddle stock for the Forest Service. And then, in the spring, all these District pack strings would be sent out, their packers would come in and they'd have them all shod, and they'd take them out to the District. But they had stand-by pack strings in there with large transport trucks, so they could take the whole pack string anywhere in the country for a fire. And, ah, but... the training camp was at the old 3-C camp, if you know what the 3C's were.

BB The CCC.

BM Civilian Conservation Corp, started during the Depression.

BB So that... was that Camp Mennard, or what's Mennard today, is that...?

BM It was the Nine Mile CCC Camp and it so states that on the sign as of yesterday.

BB Um huh.

BM We drove up to look for it and everything is destroyed. The only thing there is a... is a stone fireplace that's still standing, and I imagine the rest of it was burned out. So... but the people that sent us up there I think they... they said they were going to make a historical monument out of it. But I think these people thought that the Ccc camp was right there with the remount but it wasn't; it was on up the hill, up the mountain north, possibly somewhere between three and four miles. We had a... a little difficulty finding it, but when we finally got there I... I knew it was getting close and here's a big sign that said Nine Mile 3-C Camp... that's all it said and there was nothing else there. But up the hill we found a... a stone
fireplace, but you could see places that had been leveled off where the buildings were put.

BB Who was the foreman... who was your foreman back then?

BM Well Merle Lundrigan, who I saw the other day, was the Forest Service man in charge of the fire training... because see we had lots of fire training too... we had lots, digging trenches. But I'd all ready had quite a bit of that one time and another. I went to the Forest Service Guard School up in Corram back in 1935. So I'd had quite a bit of that, fought a lot of fires. So that was Merle Lundrigan and Frank Derry was the parachute man. Frank was a....

BB What kind of a guy was he?

BM Oh, he was a good guy. Frank and I were good friends. And lots of fun to be around but real serious and dedicated about the jumping, and real interested in the project. Then he had his brother, Chet, was there.

BB Chet Derry?

BM Chet Derry, yeah, Chester Derry.

BB What was his... what was his job?

BM He was just one of the... he was a... if we had... we had a few riggers, people who were authorized to pack parachutes, Chet was one of those. And some of the fellows who had experimented... they experimented two years before... they experimented in '39 and '40, and in '40 had made a few fire jumps, with just a... just a... I think maybe half a dozen fellows. Before they decided to go into it, see, and the Forest Service they appropriated the money for to train forty-four jumpers. And that's when I came along, that was in '41, see. Chet Derry died in a plane collision during the war up here at Hamlet... right over at the Hamilton airport. Then we had another little fellow who was strictly a parachute man, Glenn Smith. And he didn't make it to the convention, he's in... I understand in very poor physical health; lives in Tucson. And he was, prior to coming up here, he was a bat wing artist. And that was a contraption that you could jump out of an airplane with and fly around and then get down in one piece. And you had a parachute... I, but these... lots of people got killed in them. Well he was with Tex Rankin's Flying Circus, he was a bat wing artist for Tex Rankin's Flying Circus. And it was risky business because these... these wings and framework of these bat wings had to, necessarily, be extremely light, so they were extremely fragile. And maybe they would fold up, and crack the guy over the head, and he'd be on the ground before he regained consciousness. So it was... it was a real risky business in those days. [laughs]

BB How did you... how'd you feel about somebody else packing
your chute, did you trust them or...?

BM Yeah, I... well...

BB Make you kind of nervous?

BM We started right into that, see, and we learned... I learned how to pack my own chutes. Yeah, you know, when you had fellows like... like little Glenn Smith... oh, incidentally, he had one eye out, he was but, ah... a fellow like that to get him in there he didn't have to pass any physical requirements.

BB Um huh.

BM Yeah, when you had those fellows; Frank Derry was over a hundred... several hundred jumps I imagine, why, you didn't fret about how the chute was packed. And, of course, being interested in it you soon learned and watched when your chute was packed and we learned how to pack them. We got ready to get our riggers license from [inaudible]...

BB Tell me about your... your first training jump... what, how... what was that like?

BM Well, that was something, ah, I wouldn't have missed it for anything. And so when you got up there and... We did our own spotting that was another thing that was good about this... you were your own man, and you picked a spot where you think... thought you ought to get out and if you didn't hit where you wanted well the next time you did a little better. But anyway the first jump, you got out there on the step and you're hanging on here with your arms and it's a long ways down there and you know you shouldn't do it, but you go ahead and do it anyway. And then after the chute opens and you see that everything is under control, well it's... it's a view you'll never get any other place. When you're on a high mountain and you got a wonderful view but you got a mountain in the way down here, and on a parachute there's nothing in the way but your feet and you can pull them back. [laughs]

BB [laughs] Who'd you jump with that first... first training jump?

BM I can't remember, but we jumped singly.

BB Um huh.

BM Ah, and then after awhile we jumped with three on one... one spotting... three out just fast as you could get out. But for se... few jumps it was... we jumped alone.

BB What kind of plane was it?

BM Ah, mostly Travelaires. We... we jumped out of the Trimotor, but where you're just jumping two or three men at a time or like
they'd come out to the Six Mile field. It was a dirt strip about six or eight miles from our... the old 3-C camp, it was called Six Mile. And the plane would come out there and we'd go over in the trunk. So I don't know who I jumped with. There's one picture that I gave you folks that... it was the first time we jumped three just as fast as we could get out, and I was the middle one in that one, but I don't know who the other fellows were. I didn't, you know, kid they don't... I didn't write anything down and... there it is. But I'm the middle one I knew.

BB Why don't you tell me about your first fire jump.

BM Yeah, that's something else. My... well we paired off, you see, for these little fires they wouldn't... they wouldn't send one man out alone, so we... we paired off, and Bill Yaggy was my jump partner.

BB YAGGY?

BM YAGGY. We got the first fire jump from our squad, and it was up on the... in the Fish Creek drainage above Fish Lakes, you know. And the fire was on the ridge on the Montana-Idaho line. So by that time we'd worked it out where, ah, to save time the two fellows could easily get out quick enough that the first guy could do the spotting, and... and we'd take turns spotting. And it was my turn to spot... oh, no, that's right. No, we jumped individually yet. So I was the first one out. And there was a cross wind and the fire was right on top of this high ridge and there was cliffs on the... on the west side of it, and the wind was blowing... or, I mean the cliffs on the east side and the wind blowing from... from, ah, east to west which made it a dangerous situation because you had to jump out over the cliffs here in order to... for the wind to take you over to this little narrow strip right on the top of this ridge. Well I was fairly cautious. We knew we had a wind... had dropped out a test chute. So I didn't get out too far out over the cliffs and I hung out there till I lost my nerve and then I headed in, and, of course, the wind got a little stronger as I got to the ground and it carried me across the strip. And my chute settled over the tallest spruce tree in Idaho. [laughs] So... so I had a chance to try my let down procedures. So I'm hanging up there and I... and I never... ah, we had a hundred foot of rope to get down... and, ah, I knew that rope wouldn't reach the ground that much. Bill saw what happened to me so he got out a little farther out over the cliffs and he got into the clearing. So in the meantime I got my rope out and I'm hanging, no way to get to the tree, I'm hanging out there... oh, almost twenty feet from the trunk of the tree because the tree had a little limb on it... lean on it and then the limbs... and there was another tree that kind of leaned in to the smaller tree and my chute was tangled up in both of them. So I'm down to the end of my hundred foot rope and I'm not on the ground and it was... I couldn't really see what I would be jumping into and I didn't want to break an ankle. So I had ten foot of rope with a little hook in it that use to get... to get unhooked from your parachute. You hooked it into the rider, this
hook and you run it through the rings and down under your foot and up and pulled your leg up, and then when you straightened up it lifted you up and you could unhook from the chute. Now they have a quick release deal that you just pull it and it pops open, but then we had the hooks with all the... So anyway I took this... I took this other ten foot of rope and I got that hook worked through the D rings in my harness and I got down to the very end of it and I'm only about six feet from the ground so I let go and dropped into the ground. Bill landed in the clearing and they threw our... they threw our fire packs out And at that time there was a lot we didn't know about this and... and for test chutes they had wool sacks, burlap wool sacks, just... which just happened to be the right size. I don't know... I don't know why they settled on that but when you unravelled them they were seven foot square and we tied a little quarter inch rope on each corner and five pound bag of sand, and we... we found out that would drop the same rate as a man. And that's how... that was a test chute to test... check the wind drift. So, well, we've got all these burlap bags so why not throw the fire packs out on? Well the fire pack weighed forty pounds, so they hit awful hard. We had two metal one gallon canteens. We each had one, and then we had a... we each had a... a canvas water bag that held two gallon but no water in it. So we got two gallons of... Bill's canteen hit on a rock and cut a hole in it, so we got one gallon of water, and we've got a busy little fire on our hands. We left the chutes where they lay and mine up in the tree and Bill's in the clearing and we got... it was along in the afternoon and we got on that fire. By dark we had it pretty well corralled and under control... and, ah, so... just about of water and we hadn't eaten yet. So we decided that I would go down to get some water and take the two two gallon canvas bags and the one good canteen. So there's a big canyon down here. The other way you couldn't tell how far it would be to water from... you know, from our viewpoint, but down over the cliffs there was a sharp canyon and you knew there would be water down there. So it's getting dark and I got the flashlight. One of those with elastic around your head. So I have to keep working around in... in snow brush higher than your head and I sit on these rocks and kind of hang on to the snow brush and parted to see. If you could see something down there well you'd slide off hanging on to the rocks, and I thought about had it, and I got around to one place and I'm setting on this edge and hanging onto the snow brush, and trying to shine my light down in there, and I saw the top of a tree that looked to be a mature spruce. That was [laughs] out here about ten feet from me and about ten below me so I pulled myself up out of there and I kept working around. Finally I got down, and there was a nice stream down there, and I got the water. I got back up and so we had a bite to eat. Had enough water for the night, and the fire was quiet so we didn't work on it. And next morning we... we, ah, had breakfast and did a little mop up work. A fellow came up from, I think it was, the Indian Creek station, a Forest Service man. They had... they had three fellows to... to take care of the fire, see. That was the deal, we hold it till somebody else could get there and... so we'd go back. And they packed our... they packed our equipment out. Bill and I headed
off kind of cross country down the Indian Creek trail. That was that.

BB What was the name of that fire, do you remember?

BM I think they called it the Fish Creek fire.

BB And it was in Idaho?

BM No, it was... it was the Fish Creek drain dip in Montana, but the fire itself was on the divide. So it would be half... probably half in Montana and half in Idaho.

BB So after this first fire jump how did you feel, did you think... were you kind of excited about the whole thing, or...?

BM Oh, yeah, yeah, we... you know, we... it was a bad... it was a good fire year, and a bad year for... if you wanted to do a lot of parachute jumping because we didn't have many fires. You know, we were... Bill and I were real excited about it. And it was fun and it was hard work. I think we... I can't remember what... I think maybe fifteen, sixteen miles to walk out of there but we didn't... we were light and that was no problem.

BB So you did a lot... did you do a lot of hiking out?

BM Well, I only got two fire jumps in. At the second fire, yeah, I hiked out I think it was right at twenty miles. And that was the Dean Ridge fire up in the head of the Spotted Bear River up the Flathead. We had twelve men on that. There was twelve of us jumpers, and they sent in... they sent in about 100... at least maybe 150, ah... people afoot. And we'd been in there early in the morning and had the three.... We had a tough time with it. We built fire line after fire line around the head end of it and then got burned out of it and have to back up and start again, but we held it until this big crew came in. I lit on a big flat rock and sprained my ankle real badly and, ah, swelled up like that, so I spent.... The next day they brought in... there was a creek kind of on each side of this fire and the ridge in the middle so they... they brought in gasoline fire pumps. So I manned the fire pump for two days. Didn't have to aggravate the ankle, and when I walked out it didn't seem like it was going too good for awhile, but after awhile it kind of got numb, and by the time I got out it was working real good. But one fellow got hurt, and broke a leg or a hip. They had to bring a horse in to get him out. His name was Roy Abbott. And we never saw him again, he wasn't well by the time they shook the sail in the fall. But that was the Forest Service... that's what the boys say when they... the seasonal employees go, see, when the... you get a good rain in the fall, and these... your fire fighters and your seasonal people are laid off, or used to be. So that was that.

BB Did you... you ever get hurt any other time?
BM No, no, and that wasn't... that didn't... I never lost any
time on that one. It just slowed me up a little bit.

BB Do you remember any of your pilots names?

BM Oh, yes, ah, oh, and... Slim Phillips, and we ran into... to
him out there, and I... but I didn't... didn't turn out so that I
got a chance to talk to him. And Bob Johnson, I got to know Bob
quite well. And I believe, Dick Hale.

BB And those were your pilots?

BM And, and... what was the fellow that... it was a young
fellow that flew for them later... was an airline pilot... that
plane that ditched on the way to Hawaii...

BB Oh, Dick Ogg? Dick Ogg, Dick Ogg.

BM Dick Ogg... was a young fellow flying for Johnson. I don't
know that he ever flew me. And in another fellow that was
learning to... was a young flying... starting to fly for Johnson,
and his name was Fogg. And he's the fellow that flew me into
Deadwood. I... when I worked... after I got out of the Army I
went to work for the Caterpillar Tractor Company and I went...
flown back into the mountains down in Idaho, out of McCall, to
repair a V8 tractor and plow out a road to a mine in there. They
had some people stranded in there... oh, eight, ten foot of snow
on the pass and six foot of snow in the camp. So they flew... any way, this fellow that flew me in then... I, I... I'd talked
with him before... I... I knew him from the smokejumper days.
That was after the war.

BB So how many fires did you get to jump on that year?

BM Just the two.

BB Just two fires.

BM Yeah.

BB Was a pretty quiet year fire wise?

BM Yeah, it was, yeah, we were really disappointed. Of course
the Forest Service was happy, but, ah, when parachuting your
thing and you only get two fire jumps, why, that's a bad season.

BB So what would you do around camp then, when you weren't
jumping?

BM Well, I... they split us up... these twenty-four people into
three squads, and one squad to Big Prairie, and one squad to
Moose Creek in Idaho. And I stayed with the Nine Mile squad. So
we had all the sewing machines, the loft, and we rebuilt and
redesigned equipment. We worked at that... we worked in the...
we had calisthenics in the morning and then we worked in the loft
until... in the forenoon and the afternoon we played volleyball. We'd have to cut a little wood with a cross-cut saw, but we played lots of volleyball. That was supposed to be good to keep you limbered so you didn't get sprains, torn muscles, and what not.

BB You're talking about redesigning things? What exactly were you redesigning?

BM Well, I have one thing in particular, I remember. We changed a chest pack which was our auxiliary chute and I particularly remember that I build the rip cords for it. They changed the design. So Frank asked, Frank Derry asked if anybody could solder and I had done some soldering so, we went down to the little shop there and he showed me how to do it and I made all these little short rip cord for the chest packs. And, I don't know but we did a lot of sewing. They redesigned the covers for the main chute. You see, and these people had changed these chutes over from... see the year before they had rip cords, you pulled, you jumped out and proper time... lapse of time, why you pulled the rip cord. This left room for some errors. If you pulled it too quick, you could see that we'd get tangled up in the plane. Some people didn't seem to know that they had fallen almost to the ground and we had... they had a case of that kind. That fellow, they washed him out. He thought he did fine and everybody held their breath. This was the year before. But anyway, so they made a static line. You would snap the hook into a cable in the plane. The cord was about ten foot long and so we wore that. And about ten foot from the plane was when it started stringing the chute out. Then that you all broke away and so they just... they remodeled these this summer.

BB The static lines?

BM Yeah, the pack cover, improvements and things they saw that... They were feeling their way along and whenever anything seemed like it could be improved on, why we did it.

BB So, that's what kept you busy out there?

BM Yep. Oh, oh, yeah. She thinks this is funny. Ah, you got what you could... what you could procure that seemed like it might do the job so, the helmets were a football helmet. You had to have a helmet [inaudible]. So, then they decided you have to have a face mask. Well, it had to be fairly strong so that you could slam you face into the rocks and not cave it in. And, it had to have a rather small mesh so a stick couldn't come in and jab you. And the thing that seemed to be about right for it was a weening muzzle for a calf. That you put on this calf to ween him from the cow, and that was about... it was the right size and they didn't take much shaping to get it the right shape and then they put a hinge on it and I think they had a little welding done on it for the hinge. They hinged it on, they put a couple of straps to tie it shut after you pulled it down. So, that was our first mask. Oh, and another... in our first sleeping bags, they
didn't want to have to carry all this stuff out, you know, so they wanted a throw away bed. I don't know who the shepherder was, but their... [laugh] they... the wool sacks come again, only this time, they were paper, about three thicknesses of paper, kind of soft and kind of corrugated. They were seven feet long and three feet wide, or three and a half feet wide. So, you crawled in there, to regulate the heat, you rolled one corner down. If it was a hot night, why, you'd have them clear open and if it got cold or storm come up, why, you'd roll it down to where you'd had a little hole like that, enough to get air. So, that was our first... that was our first ah, beds. Then we got some real dandy, like little down sleeping bags, towards the end of the session.

BB Did you have to pack those out then?

BM Well, they thought we might have to. We had to pack them to where they could get them with horses. We had to pack to a trail, so they wanted to keep this stuff as light as they could but in, ah... on both of my fires we never packed any of our rig except to gather it up and get it down to where we were camped. This Dean Rich fire they got right up on it... or I mean this Fish Creek fire they got right up to where we were at and so we didn't pack our stuff [inaudible]. But, two chutes and then this jump suit was quite heavy. It was two layers of canvas with felt, solid felt, probably about quarter inch or three eights inch thick in the shoulders and ah, the elbows, forearms, the thighs, and the knees, between two layers of, probably about ten, twelve ounce canvas. And then the collars, were kind of....

BB Cowl type?

BM When you turned them up, they came around like this so you turned them down. Landing in the timber, you didn't want a limb to run up that helmet, so this collars were about four thicknesses of canvas and stitched, a row of stitching about every half inch to make it stiff. So designed that, when you pulled it up, it would stay up there.

BB Do you make those kind of suits?

BM Yeah, they made them. Well, they remodeled them. After they finally figured out what they wanted, they had those suits made. But then we changed them, put pockets. As things cropped up that needed changing, well, we changed them. For instance, we had a pocket to hold this hundred foot [inaudible]... to hold this hundred foot roll of three eights inch rope. Well, those old Eagle chutes popped you so hard when they came open that we lost a few ropes. It popped them... it ripped them right out of the pocket. [Laugh]. So, they had a back to the drawing board, beef up these pockets a little bit. Then they got some little radios. They were metal and about, oh, four inches square and about ten inches high, and so they put them in the pocket on the other side and we lost a lot of radios [laugh] before they, ah, they finally did... It was a little bit dangerous because they
had a hard metal case, quick jump and bitch them out afterwards. [Pause]. We had a lot of condemned military chutes... Irving chute, that they used for cargo probably. So, after this disaster with our packs and trying to drop a forty pound pack on a seven by seven burlap, well, that didn't pan out so they take both fire packs and put them together and drop them out on it. And then, the radios, if you got a radio, you know, on bigger fires, the radio with any power was quite large. And they'd drop them out on a Irving chute and they would take two truck innertubes and put one around one way and put one around the other way and then pump them up so that they would be that big around and then tie it on a chute. They dropped that fragile stuff that way.

BB Who stayed in the planes and dumped the cargo out?

BM Well, there be a... be a squad leader probably or anybody that was available to throw you stuff out afterwards, what you needed. And they'd fly around, it just seemed like everybody was alive and well and getting ready to go to work and then they'd leave.

BB How did you signal that you were OK? Or did they see you or hang around?

BM Well, they could see that, well, for instance, in my case they could see when I got down out of the tree and they knew we were all right. When Bill and I started to work on the fire, they assumed we were all right. Ah, but we had a... we were going to signal and Frank came out, Frank had his, a little plane. He came the next day to see how we were doing and we saw him but he never could spot us and we were trying to signal him with a looking glass but we never could get it on him.

BB So they weren't using any kind of signal things in those days?

BM Well, yeah, they finally got to where they would drop the little radios. Like I said, at first, jump out with a radio on there that would rip out of the pocket. On a... they dropped some big radios on this fire. This was my second fire. We didn't have a radio on this... that was the first fire out of this... out of our group.

BB Wasn't it kind of scary jumping out, knowing that all of this equipment that you're using is still got a lot of kinks in it?

BM No. No. We knew the chutes were good. You didn't worry, you know. I was just a kid then and ah, I did all kinds of things. I rode bucking horses, and I drove like a maniac, and that parachuting was probably much safer than riding with me in an automobile, so it was just... just a way of life.

[END OF SIDE A]
BB We were talking a little bit about your equipment and designing and proving and everything. Um...when you were just starting to jump, did you feel like you had to prove yourself to anybody? That you had something to prove.

BM No...no. I had confidence in myself that you wouldn't believe. I...that was always a failing of mine. I never doubted myself. So, my idea was that if anybody could jump out of a parachute and put out a fire, that I could do it. So, it was no problem. And I don't suppose I've changed a great deal today. Although I know I can't climb a mountain like I use to, but I still...that was my middle name. And I think all of these fellows were that type of person.

BB Did you, uh, feel there was a lot of comradery between you and your friends you jumped with?

BM Oh yes. Yes there was. We had a lot of fun. Frank Derry was real good on the piano and accordion, and I had a banjo, we made a lot of music. We played for dances. I played for dances for quite a number of years. And we all...but we all had a lot of fun together.

BB You think you stuck together pretty good? Watched out for each other?

BM Oh yes. Oh yes. But, I was only there the one year. When I left in the Fall... now, lets see, I went up and took a hunting party in for [INAUDIBLE]. I had a guide license--I was a packer and guide and I took out two hunting parties that fall. And then I came out of there and I went over to Wallace rustled the mines over there and didn't get a job. And then I went back to Butte and got a job in the mines there. I was gonna go to school, but the draft board wouldn't defer me until the end of the year if I started, so I didn't start. So I worked in the mines. Pearl Harbor came, and I decided, well maybe I better get on the ball and...so she and I were engaged. I enlisted. When I got my draft notice, I was over in Africa somewhere.

BB What service were you in?

BM I was in the Air Force, 320th Bomber. And so, when I came back, I was stationed at Gulden Field at Boise, and I got out. I was interested in heavy equipment so, I got a job with that Cat outfit down there. Stayed there for three years, and finally came back to Montana. So, I never come back to the Forest Service.

BB Why didn't you come back to jumping?

BM I didn't come back to jumping.
I know. Why didn't you?

Well, at that time it was seasonal work.

Uh, huh.

And I, by that time I was married and had our first child and I felt like I had to be into something...that paid a little better. Steady. But, I, finally I had to come back to Montana. So, I worked as a heavy duty mechanic and then I got my own equipment [INAUDIBLE] The last twenty five years before I retired, I piled slash all over Montana, with my own equipment--pile logger. I was an engineer gunner, I went through engineer's school and then I went through gunnery school.

Do you think your smokejumping training helped you at all going through the military?

Well, I was quite confident about if I ever had to bail out... I was... it would seem like it should be done! There would be no problem there. And on one trip... why, our waist gunner too... the air was rough on the way out. He lost his balance and stepped on his parachute and pulled the rip-cord. And he had his guns out, the windows were open on both sides, and the gun out and the bottom... the bottom gun was out. Terribly drafty in there. So I heard him holler from--I'm up in the top turret--so I look down and all I could see was silk. And he was laying in the middle of it, trying to gather it up. And, uh, so, I told him to hold on and we pulled the guns in and got the windows shut and got the air quieted down. So, I had him hold it for me and I got his chute back in pretty good shape. He didn't have any confidence in it, so I said, "OK, you take my chute, this chutes all right. I can jump with it." So we went on over the target. But he was wanting to go home. He was...his chute was all scattered all over the inside of the airplane. So, I had this confidence, you know. Well, I didn't tell them about this. See, I could have went into, probably into the paratroops, but.... As well as the other things I have done--being a packer and a guide--I was a rifleman. From the time I was a little kid I'd been allowed to shoot. And I knew that the man hanging out there on a parachute with a good rifleman around, didn't have a chance. So, I never...no where in my Army records that indicates that I every saw a parachute. I stayed out of that part of the plane. I...I didn't want any part--I wanted to fly, is what I wanted to do.

Uh, huh.

But I didn't want to be hanging out there on a parachute with somebody shooting at me. That was my choice.

Earlier you mentioned Henry Thol and his son who was killed at Man Gulch fire. What do you think about that fire? What do you think happened there?
BM Well, I... I don't want to comment on it. These boys had a lot of experience about... I mean, the squad leader had... well, ah, but.... You saw this fire go up the mountain here, yesterday, see and they had a lot of grass in this area. This grass is dry, and a fire can travel so fast in that grass that a person should be real cautious about ever getting out in front of one. And I... although they landed a long way from that fire, uh, they hashed it all over and I'm sure they learned a lot from it. [Was a] costly bit of learning. And this outfit is getting better as it goes along. I noticed there were no... that memorial is one... there was no deaths in the line of duty, past 1970. See, you got about thirteen years without, you might say, a mishap. This was a bad deal. There were probably several things that could have been done to help the situation. Maybe if they had good contact with the air, and they had a plane around there keeping an eye on them, see. After you're down in the timber, you can't see may be if that fire is really starting to take off towards you, and you got no wind were your at, the fire makes its own wind. [INAUDIBLE] But, I wasn't there, and I felt just as bad as anybody else did. But, uh, they got a good record, and it's getting better all the time.

BB Did you know Earl Cooley?

BM Oh, yes. Yes, I knew him. And I met him over here the other day.

BB Did you ever get to work with him? Or....

BM Well, he wasn't a... well, yeah, just doing training. No, see, Earl was in a different squad.

BB So, you trained with him.

BM Yeah, I trained with him.

BB Did you get along pretty good?

BM Oh, I got along with everybody. We all got along. There was no problem. Everybody got along. Fred Brauer....

BB Fred Brauer, too? What kind of a guy was Bob Johnson?

BM Bob was a prince. And, I... he was just hard to... he was unbeatable. And such a kind sort of a fellow. You know, and a good pilot, of course. But I stopped in out there after the war, went into see Bob, and he remembered me. Gosh, he took me all over the whole plant and showed me what they were doing. Looked at all the airplanes they were flying. He was just that kind of a guy. He had all kinds of time for you. Yeah, he was a good guy.

BB What did you do up at Nine Mile for recreation, besides music? Did you guys do....
BM Well, we played lots of volleyball. And we could come to town. You see, we were, we were... after it got dark, then our time was our own. See, so we could come to town. Which we did quite a lot. [LAUGHTER]

BB Is that were you met your wife?

BM No, I met her when she was just a little... I met her when she was a freshman in high school. I finished my last two years of high school here in Missoula.

BB What high school did you go to?

BM Well, I was raised down in southern Oregon... Oh! The old one on Higgins Avenue.

BB Hellgate?

BM Yeah, there was only one school then, and it was called Missoula County High School. She was a freshman there, and my senior, when I was a senior, and I've known her ever since.

BB So, what did you do when you came to town?

BM [LAUGHTER] Well, we would hit some of the night spots, occasionally. Go to a dance once and in a while. Nothing that any other bunch of young fellows wouldn't do. [BACKGROUND LAUGHTER]

BB Did you get into any trouble?

BM Never! No, we never got into any trouble. No, we kind of felt like we had, you know, that we had a reputation, or something, to uphold. We were all conscious that we had to conduct ourselves in a very decent manner. And we did.

BB Did the towns people have pretty good respect for smokejumpers in those days?

BM Well, oh, I'm sure they did. Of, course there wasn't enough of us to... not too many people actually had any contact with us, you know. But I know on days when they were jumping, if they had announced it, like out at Six Mile, there would be lots of people out there watching. Something new. You got thousands of people who never saw a parachute jump, so you had that... people out curiosity coming out and watch the jump.

BB Did you feel you were a professional firefighter?

BM Well, I... yeah, I would say that I was, because I had been through a lot of fire schools and the parachuting here made... eighth year. Forest Service in eighth years of fighting fires. I was a smokechaser, that was what I was classed as. And a lookout fireman. My main thing was, I... and I chased smoke alone all through the Mission Mountains--the most rugged country we have. I'm sure I was considered competent. I could go out
there in the heavy timber with a map, and a compass, the location and find my fire; survive by myself.

BB You mentioned you were a packer and a guide, did you ever work with the remounts, or anything like that?

BM No, I didn't. Uh, but I did a little packing when they built that Holland Trail. I quit them one year. I don't [INAUDIBLE]--I don't think they were paying me enough--so I went back to Oregon for a little while. So I came back up in the next year they wanted me to work, so I did. I guess they thought I was getting tired of the lookouts. They were building that Holland Trail, from Lower Holland up to Upper Holland--the old trail went up over the top, over the old Gordon Pass. So I... I packed--I had a short pack sprint that I kept at the Holland Guard Station. And I packed the supplies for the camp, the gasoline, and the dynamite. They had a compressor, to drill... to pull the rock, they had a blaster to reach the rock and the hard places. So, I packed... I think I had five pack mules and saddle horses, and then they had a big work team, they had to have... to pull this compressor. So, I'd bring these big animals up on days they had to move the compressor. But I... my uncle was an outfitter, so I had... was well grounded as a pack leader in guiding and I had spent my whole life in the mountains. It was no problem.

BB Did you get a lot of people coming out to do that kind of thing? I mean....

BM Oh, yes. They took in hunting parties in the Bob Marshall Wilderness, that was one... fishing parties. Of course, I didn't... I never worked on any fishing parties. [INAUDIBLE]

BB Did you ever do any rescue jumps?

BM No.

BB Or ever have any jumpers come in?

BM No.

BB Do you feel that's a good part of smokejumping? Did you use that now-a-days?

BM Yes! Yes. Although the helicopters make a pretty good rescue instrument, but if you were right out in the heavy timber and you had... you got a man hurt, you can put a crew down there to pack him out, or where you can get at him with a helicopter... [INAUDIBLE]

BB Your, ah... Back to parachutes. You say you worked with the Eagle, and what other one?

BM That... those... our chutes were Eagles.

BB Eagles, only Eagles.
BM Backpack was a... the main chute a twenty eight foot Eagle. The chest pack was smaller and it was, I think probably it was a twenty six footer.

BB Did, uh, did you find that the Eagle had a lot of malfunctions, or was it a pretty good chute?

BM Well, it was a good chute. It was very severe. It could hurt you when the wind popped it open. At that time we were suppose to jump at 2,000 feet above the terrain and so we were jumping over here a mile and we could hear those chutes pop when they opened. The chute was kind of wide and flat, and kind of a little small skirt around the edge, and when the wind caught that it just--just like that, and it... and a severe jerk. And on my first jump, they taught us to put your hands across the chest pack and then to keep your feet together. That was so you... if you tumbled you wouldn't get tangled up in the shroud lines. Of course, I was very tense and I brought the draft down and was suppose to jump right straight up. The chute jerked it towards the tail of the plane, because you're traveling, see, 60 to 80 miles an hour this way. This hurt me, and I had a spot the size of my hand black and blue on each side where the risers cut into my arm. Really sore! My next jump, I did my own, and I jumped and had my arms out wide so that it wouldn't be tight here. And I jumped laying at a 45 towards the tail and that no jerk, just a great big swing, so that's the way I jumped after my first jump--we were free to do.... What you thought had to be done.

BB Did the rest of the guys kind of follow you then?

BM Well, some of them got hurt, and some of them were trying to, yeah, to lean into it a little bit towards the chute. And the ones that didn't get hurt, I guess, just kept jumping straight. Probably I thought that... the chances are that the reason I got hurt, I was tightened up so tight that probably I had my arms clear across. See, no room up here for any movement [inaudible]. But I got... on my other jumps it was just a pleasure. Just a big swing. [inaudible] no jar. And I got kind of lamed up a little bit, in training, trying to do what they told me to do. Jumped off of a... jumping off of a six foot platform, with a full chute, you know, your chest chute and the harness and everything on, would be a lot like hitting the ground. So, we're jumping off of there and they're sizing us up to see how we're doing it. So, somebody said "You gotta have your legs straighter." I don't know why, but finally I jumped off of there. They didn't want you to come down, clear down, and hurt a knee or hit your face with your knee, I think was the reason they wanted you to jump straighter. And I finally jumped off of there almost straight, and I hurt my back. So, I bent my knees after that. Like I say, we did what we thought we had to do.

BB Did they... have they changed that whole thing now, do you think?
BM I don't know. I don't know. They... well, I'm sure they
don't try to jump off of a six foot tower stiff legged. I
know... they knew that wouldn't work.

BB [LAUGHTER] How did the... oh, all the different kinds of
work you did with the Forest Service, what did you enjoy the
most, do you think?

BM Well, I enjoyed the jumping the most, except that I didn't
get to jump enough. See, we would have... we would have jumped
out any time we could get somebody to haul us up there and let us
out. That's the way, you know, that you... you want to be a
parachute jumper, you want to jump. And of course, we didn't get
near enough of it to satisfy us.

BB How to you feel about how much it's grown since you jumped?

BM It turned out to be a tremendous organization. Maybe... I
think we had all the best of it, I think, we had the fun part.
You know, the more something gets organized, it all worked out
what you're gonna do and what you're not gonna do. We didn't
have these restrictions.

BB You didn't have any rules, or... rules you had to follow?

BM I read by that book that they had some rules for 1940 or
1941, but I never heard about that.

BB So there were no rules.

BM No. Like we... may be we were even... like I say, we did a
little partying, and its possible they told us we ought to
conduct ourselves in a pretty reasonable way. And we knew this.
We had certain standards to uphold. And we did. But, those...
these restrictions it seems that I never heard about that. I
don't suppose... I think that's something they decided they ought
to have maybe later. And maybe they decided they ought to have
it then and wrote it down, but they didn't do anything with it.
You know, you take a handful of real good guys, you don't have
to make a whole bunch of regulations for them.

BB How do you feel about the policy changes that's occurred, as
far as fires are concerned: where sometimes now they just let the
fires go.

BM Well, I don't think... they do that in the primitive areas,
the wild areas. I don't think they should, and I don't think they
do do that where accessible, merchantable (sic) timber is
involved.

BB Well, you're... you're quite a mountain man, so I was
wondering what you felt about it. Even in primitive areas. Do
you think that's a good thing? Or....
BM Well, if they don't let it get out of hand, yeah. It makes more game feed. But, but you've got one thing you have to keep in mind, is that they... these fires have been burning up forests before there were any of us people around, you know. But, they kept the fires down so long in these primitive areas that you have such a fire trap built up that you might lose an awful chunk of country if you didn't keep an eye on it. Maybe knock them down once and a while. But there are places where they can let it go... I mean, there are conditions where they can let it go and do its work. But you better watch it!

BB So, kind of keep a handle still...?

BM Yeah, yeah. That's... the fire trap is built up, see. Where before in the natural state of things that, you get a little fire hazard built up, the lightning storm touches it off, and so you lose your fire hazard, maybe, some timber.

BB Do you think that people use to be a little bit more gung ho about fires. Like, with Smokey Bear and everything, than they are now? Or, do you think that traditional feeling is still being carried on? Just the average, everyday person. Do you think that they...?

BM Well, I... I don't know.

BB I mean the spirit.

BM The people that are raised out in the forest. Like we've been in the forest--I've been in the forest all my life. She's [Mrs. Martin] been in the forest ever since she's married me. These people that live out there, are looking after the country. And looking after the people who don't know any better, you know, to build a camp fire and walk off and leave it. Or they... maybe they think they put it out, and they don't know they got it out. I've put out... Well, I've put out a lot of little fires around here. But the people that live there know these things. And they're the one's that will count with the country. Along with the Forest Service and [inaudible]

BB Do you think the Smokey Bear image had a lot to do with the helping, as far as fires go? Or....

BM I... well, yes, I think it did. I think it was something. It didn't change the people that lived there, because they didn't need a Smokey Bear to bring this to their attention. They lived with it. They're just like us, I've worked pile slash all over Montana, and they send me back here to the mountains on a road, the first thing I want to know--and the first thing I find out: is there another way out? You're conscious of this all the time. So, you got a camp ground down here, and you're dead end road up here in a fire trap and a fire gets out. So, you know about... you're... they're never out of your mind.

BB Did you ever get to see that movie, "Red Skies Over
Montana"? How did you feel about that movie?

BM  Oh, I thought it was... I guess it was all right. Yeah.

BB  Do you think it was pretty true to life? Or....

BM  Oh, it was...

Mrs. Martin  ...Hollywooded... [LAUGHTER]

BM  Yeah, yeah.

Mrs. Martin  Speaking of Smokey, I think it did a lot of good for the young children.

BM  Well, I think so too. Around the schools, you know. I think we're teaching the city kids how to conduct themselves in the country, and that's good. And maybe we didn't have that when I was a kid. Maybe just us folks who lived out there knew about these things. Because I have seen people throw cigarettes down right... I've come along, grind 'em up, and even give them a little lecture, you know, because you've have to. And now, I think they've educated people enough.

Mrs. Martin  Pick up, too—keep it clean for Smokey.

BM  Yeah, that... I think that helps, too. Gosh, we've gone out to campgrounds to have a little cook-out, and spent two hours cleaning up the campground. And you still have that sort of thing. But I think that the average city dweller knows a lot more about fire prevention than they did.

BB  How do you feel now when you see smoke on a mountain? What kind of feelings does that bring out?

BM  Well, that's a... I hate to see a fire destroy a lot of nice country. It doesn't wipe out the country, but it wipes out anything that's in it, and I hate to see that. I've lived to be outdoors and I don't want to see it do that, and I don't suppose anybody else does. But, I don't panic in a fire. We... this outfit now... you see, what you've got... when I was a kid, fighting fires, you couldn't get out in front of it. You couldn't put men out in front of a bad fire. Now, that's what the Bull Ridge force is, they can knock that fire down until you can get men and equipment in there to... you could make it safe to put men out in front of a fire. Just like the Mann Gulch fire, they could have spread a few loads of borate in there, they could have walked those men right down to that fire. If they had and assured stream of borate coming in. That's what [INAUDIBLE] hold it down so they can get a handle on it. Makes it safe for the people out there. Before you just had to kind of try to pinch in from the sides, so you make your big pushes in the morning when it was real calm, just as soon as it was light enough to get in there try and... but always got your eye out for
a blow-ups. See, you always got... your eye open for a way out. You always got to have to have a way out.

BB Did you ever have anything blow-up on you?

BM I never... I never fought any real big fires; I was a smoke chaser. I fought little fires alone, where you had a tough time and you get a fire line started, and then it would get across it, and then you back up it, and start again.

BB Did you ever have any to the point where... that it was looking pretty serious, and you were kind of scared it might blow-up on you?

BM Well, yeah. I've been scared... I say, I did fight on one big fire, but I was just a kid. And I packed... I backpacked on that fire that was one big fire. I backpacked for over a month, every day. They had... oh, I think they had about 75 men in there. They had... they had one 3-C crew. This is back in 1934. And I... I could climb mountains, and I got... had a dry camp on top, and I'd pack them water. They had 3-C boys packing water, and everybody was complaining about--down on the fire line--and no... anybody getting any water so, they put me on that water. I made two trips around that fire, down one side and up the other, with water every day. And then, once and a while I'd go over to the lookout, which was about three miles, for a load of grub, because they couldn't get packs in--something... they couldn't get packs back in. So, for a month, I packed. Well, the fire probably lasted about three weeks, but then I stayed in there until school started--by myself. I stayed at the lookout and I'd hike over to patrol the fire every day.

BB By what lookout was that?

BM That was the old Hemlock lookout in the Swan.

BB How old were you?

BM I was sixteen. I was suppose to be eighteen, but I was raised in the mountains. This was just all fun for me.

BB Where were you born?

BM Uh, Klamath... Upper Klamath Lake, in Oregon.

BB And then you were pretty much raised up around the Missions?

BM Well, yeah. I came in there when I was sixteen, to the Swan. And I've been there, outside of the war and that hitch in Boise for Cat, I've been there ever since.

BB You're up there now?

BM Oh, yes. Down on the Swan Lake. I settled on upper end of
BB Did you ever get tagged with a nickname, or anything, from your buddies?

BM I was always just "Bob."

BB Let me see... are there any more stories you would like to tell? Any little yarns about anybody? Or...

BM Well, you see, I wasn't just one summer in the program... in the Smokejumpers.

BB I know, but, stories about anything that has to do fire in the hills, or anything like that. Anything you thought was pretty interesting?

BM Well...

BB Have any bears run you up a tree?

BM Grizzlies have always interested me. Yeah, this fire--this first fire, when I was sixteen years old and I had just come up from Oregon that spring, and I saw my first Grizzly on that fire. And I didn't have a firearm. I was packing water, I was down in the bottom... there was a flat draw--they call it kind of a little hanging valley. Elk Lake out here a little trickle of water running out of the base of a cliff, and this open, grassy water. See, we're up in the high country, out in front of it almost flat and fire up the hill, camp right on top. Because we had to come in along the ridge top. So, it took about thirty minutes to fill a five gallon backpack out... had a little trickle running out through a little piece of bark. Propped the pack up there, and I'm about half asleep. And here's a bear coming up--a grizzly, he was about that high. And I had never seen a grizzly, but I knew this was a grizzly because I've seen lots of blacks and browns. This was a grizzly, you know, the big head, and higher in the shoulders, and typical grizzly color. He was limping on one front foot, walking up there. And he's kind of looking, he can hear the shovel and axes up the hill. And I've got my back right against the cliff and there's not a bush to climb. So, I'm not quite breathing [LAUGHTER], I'm being real still. So, he stopped right in front of me, and I said... he only out there--I could've hit him with a rock--and he stopped right in front of me. He still doesn't know I'm there. And he listened to all this... he could hear the chopping up the hill. So, he was limping when he came in there, so he turned around and started back down this open glade. So, he came, only faster. Still limping. So, he got out about forty yards from me, and I let out a war whoop that you could have heard for miles. He took off and ran. But, I later learned that could have been a mistake, see, I could have startled him and he could have come back and wiped me out. I should have been real still and let him go, but, uh... I thought once I had him moving, I would just hurry him up a little bit. And he did. But, it could have been
a mistake. That was my first grizzly.

BB So, you learned from that.

BM And... yeah. So, the next year when I came out on the Forest Service, I had a hand gun. I was never unarmed after that. I never had to use one, but it's a comfort when you're prowling around at night in the brush. And the flashlight plays out, you know, your looking for a fire. And in the brush crashed and a snort and you don't know if going or coming, a gun is kind of comforting. And I've had lots... I like bears, really. And I've had lots of experiences with them. You know, your brown... around these guard stations, you always got a garbage pit, and you always got bears digging into it. They're fun to have around. We had a grizzly tore up our house, while we were gone--must have been seven, eight years ago.

BB Up the Swan?

BM Yeah. Broke all the glass out... ate all the food. He went clear around the outside, looking in, because all the glass was on the inside. And the house was a mess: all the cupboards tore out, the food... all mixed, bear tracks all over the floor. His left foot was over seven inches wide, measured on the floor. He did most of his coming in and out over the kitchen sink, because that's were the foot was. He broke the front door out, the door lock held, so it split the jam top to bottom--split it out. It was a mess.

BB We're just about out of tape.

BM I'm just about out of [LAUGHTER]

BB Thanks for talking to me. I enjoyed it.

[END OF INTERVIEW]