
SG This is an interview with Chuck Sheley and just to get the statistics, I guess, right... you trained at Cave Junction?

CS In 1959, yeah.

SG And then?

CS Jumped there through '66 and went to Fairbanks in... well, really McGrath in '67... Fairbanks in '68... 9... and '70... Silver City in 1960 going on a detail from Region-6.

SG What kinds of things were you working at prior to getting into smokejumping, say 5 years, or so, before?

CS Ah, I had 2 years on a tanker crew on the Lassen National Forest. Prior to that I was in high school and just had a normal run of summer jobs. So, Forest Service experience was just the 2 years on the tanker crew and then on to jumping.

SG How did you hear about jumping?

CS I think, ah... you know, I first came across it when, ah... jumpers out of Redding jumped the Lassen Forest where I was working, sat and listened to them on the radio one day. I said, "Wow, that beats tanker crew by a long shot." [Chuckles].

SG When you say it beats it, how did it seem?

CS I don't know how... it seemed pretty glamorous. It seemed like a challenge. I've always taken a challenge and it seemed like a challenge. So, I just started it and went back to school that fall and started writing letters. I had no idea where jumpers were. What bases there were. I just wrote and got answers and went from there. Was turned down. And then finally, I was planning on going back to the tanker crew on the Lassen. Cave Junction got ahold of me one Easter and said somebody failed a physical exam and if get yours back in 3 days, we'll... we'll hire you. So, bingo, got it back in probably a day... I was pretty excited, and got hired on at Cave Junction. But, still had no real idea of what the job entailed or just kind of pictures of what they expect or anything like that. I just threw my gear in my car and headed up and reported.

SG You must have been kind of exciting, gosh?

CS It was. I was and it was... exciting.

SG What was that first view like, right when you drove up on the base?

CS Have you been through Cave Junction on your...?
SG  No, I'll be going through there on the way back though.

CS  You haven't been through there. It's extinct it's no longer... Ah, the town of Cave Junction... I came into the town and there was a population sign and it said 1,300 and something, so I said, "Wow, this isn't bad." But somebody had put a 1 in front of the 3, so, it was only 300. It was really small. And then the first thing you do when you get into town... ask, "Where's the Smokejumper base." As soon as you ask that of someone at the service station, they give you that look, "Oh, oh, not another one!" And the guy says, "Seven miles south." So, you head south of town and you get out there across the street from the Rough and Ready Mill behind a tourist trap. The Snake Farm was the name of the tourist trap. Behind the Snake Farm was the Smokejumper Base. [Chuckles]. You come across something like that and you say, "Geez, what am I in? What kind of an outfit is this?" Out in the middle of nowhere. But in the long run, that's what made Cave Junction, was the fact it was in the middle of nowhere. We called it the Gobi since it was kind of like the Gobi Desert. Being a base of 23 to 24 people, I think it really made you a tight-knit that group. And that was, you know, that was some of the uniqueness of that particular Base as compared to the other Bases I've been... Missoula, and Fairbanks, and the larger ones like that.

SG  When you arrived there that day, did you stay in the barracks or...?

CS  Yeah. Yep, went down and said, "Here I am." They throw you a blanket or 2, and find a cubicle, and then you sit around and you look at all the other rookies and that... "Hi," and, "how are you." And then, you know, the experienced people kind of sit off to the side. There was a difference to start with.

SG  When did you start your training after you arrived?

CS  Seemed like we started right off. I must have gotten there on a Saturday and Monday must... I'm sure, was the day we started.

SG  Pretty quick.

CS  Yeah.

SG  Do you remember very much about your training?

CS  I tell you the truth... do I or don't I? Not a heck of a lot. I remember it was real structured. I remember that the squad leaders were pretty impersonal and, ah, I didn't really like that. When I got into the situation where I was training people later on, I felt that, boy, I'm doing this different. The way I teach, the way I coach, I try to be more personal and less militaristic, I guess. And I thought that was a difference, I thought, boy, these guys are really rigid, this is pretty military, it was... you know, you cut it... you're going to cut
it or you don't. There were guys gone down the road the second
day and that sort of thing. That would be my impression of the... you know, squad leaders doing the training at that time.
Really impersonal, they didn't even try to get to know you. Sort
of deal like that.

SG  Do you think that was hard on the other rookies?

CS  Yeah I do. I think... I think in the long run, when you're
working with larger groups of people, maybe that's the way you
have to do it. Maybe that's the way you have to do in the
military, but I don't think when you're... when the people get to
that point are pretty select anyway, that we might have sent some
people down the road that would have been good jumpers in the
long run. As a matter of fact, I know we did.

SG  Why do you think it was so militaristic? Where'd that come
from?

CS  Well, I think at the time we had some... we a bunch of ex­
military doing the training, to start with. I know when I came
back from Silver City in '61, the overhead had changed. In that
short period of time I had been gone, some people had come back
from the military, and boy, that was... it was well structured
when I got back. I think it evolved from that type of structure
into a more unstructured type training where the end results are
just as good. You know, during the '63... '64, in that area
there.

SG  So, you saw it moving from kind of becoming more
increasingly more militaristic... authoritarian and that and then
it started...?

CS  I thought so, yeah, and then I thought we got away from
that.

SG  So, did overhead change quite a bit during the years that
you...?

CS  Yeah, we had... in contrast to what I see now, and talking
to the people at the reunion, there's guys jumping, still now,
that I jumped with. We had... like, my rookie class was 16
people out of 24 people on the base, so, there was as many
rookies and the next year we must have trained 12 more people and
we continually trained large groups of people until the mid '60's
when we were down to training 3... 4... 2. Then I heard in the
early '70's, when I went out of jumping, that some years, as now,
there are no rookies. So, there's not the turnover now that they
had when I first started and I don't know the reason for that.

SG  Did people not tend to return. Like that first year that
you were rookied, how many rookies returned the next year?

CS  I would say half. They moved on and I don't know why. Maybe
they were career oriented and this was just a one shot stop on
their way.

SG  Do you remember thinking when you first went out to the base that first year... do you remember thinking that it was something that you would make a career at or something you'd stay with for a long time?

CS  No. I was too much in the dark to even think of anything like that. I didn't... later on I had an opportunity... oh, about '63 or '64, I had a big decision to make. I was offered a position at Cave Junction, and here I was about a second year teacher and my starting salary as a teacher, I started like... $5... $4800 and I was offered a GS-11 at Cave Junction at about $11,000 at that time. I thought, "Oh, my god. Here's, ah... I've went through 6 years... I've gone through years of college to become a teacher. I am a teacher. I've got about a 1 week notice to make a decision. Do I want to pack up and go to work for the Forest Service?" So, that was really about the only time I had to make a decision about whether I wanted to stay with this or not and I decided to stay with teaching.

SG  A GS-11, is that a supervisor?

CS  That was the Air Project Officer at that time, yeah?

SG  Was it at Silver City or Cave Junction?

CS  No. It was at Cave Junction. The Air Project Officer at that time was leaving to go over to Redmond. They were just starting Redmond at that time and that position was coming open.

SG  That must have been a hard one.

CS  It was real hard. It, ah... a few sleepless nights but it boiled down to the fact that I had trained to be a teacher and I thought, "Hey, I could still teach and I could still jump." I could have the best of both and currently I feel that that was a good decision. I'm still working for the Forest Service and I love my fire and I'm still teaching and I love my teaching and my coaching, too, so.

SG  Yeah, it does sound like you did a good thing. A few of the jumpers that have commented that nowadays, either because people are staying around so long or whatever the reason might be, there doesn't seem to be anywhere to go. The positions are not opening up as quickly.

CS  They don't seem to be. I had noticed though that it seemed like advancement... when I went to Fairbanks in '67, the Bureau of Land Management people advance so much more rapidly than the Forest Service People do. If a person wanted to stick it out in Alaska and had the gumption to make it through the winters up there. Stay sober, or whatever that the advancement was there...I mean, people were shooting right up to the top. Whereas the Forest Service, it's tough to advance in the Forest Service. At
least, that's my opinion. Gee whiz, I'm seeing jumpers... I ran into Nevada last summer, who are now state MFO's. Utah, Nevada... the whole '76. They've shot right to the top. Of course, again, I think that indicates the talent of the people who are jumpers, too.

SG  So, you feel like their positions were... their movement is determined by their talent... by their experience?

CS  I think so... right place, right time, but it's like anything, you could be at the right place, right time but if you don't have the talent to go with it, you're not going to make it. So, jumpers have been talented aggressive type individuals and at the right place, too.

SG  Right place and the right time... I've heard that a lot this week. [Laugh].

CS  I bet.

SG  Well, getting back to just that first year you went through your training. Do you remember any names of who your squad leaders were or...?

CS  Well, I remember Ron Fritsch [Ronald L.], our head squad leader and Mike Burns and Norm Pulaski, I think were the 3 individuals that were responsible. I know Ron went into the Marine Corps and he, I think, retired from the Marine Corp now. We... at least I ran into him at our Cave Junction reunion which is a good 8 or 9 years ago now. Mike... I've got no idea what happened to him and Norm Pulaski's a PhD at Oregon State now in Chemistry.

SG  Who was the project supervisor?

CS  Jim Allen was. Yeah, Jim Allen went from Cave Junction to Redmond and he's the Air Project Officer at Redmond. Jim's retired now. I saw Jim 2 winters ago when I was up skiing at Redmond in the winter.

SG  Do you remember getting to know any of the overhead at all very much that first year or were you...?

CS  No. As a rookie, you're on the outside. If you're smart, you keep your mouth shut and you what you're told. At least, that's always been my opinion of a new job. You just work hard and keep your mouth shut and so, you get to know the overhead as you prove yourself, sort of a thing.

SG  So, how long was your training?

CS  I'm... let me see, I think our training was about a month long. I think we became fire ready or on the jump list just about after... well, I'd say, 7th... 8th... or 10th of July, somewhere in that area there. We started approximately a month
earlier.

SG Do you remember the kinds of things they trained you in? I know they trained you in parachuting and, ah...?

CS The same thing... I bet you the training is pretty standard to what it is now, you know... many alien rolls, many many "let downs" you know... a lot of physical training. I felt that the physical training at Cave Junction was always emphasized. It seems like we did a lot of running. I know when I took over the training, that was one of my things. I'm still a track coach and cross-country coach and I emphasize that too, so, I probably picked that up from the guys that trained me.

SG How many miles a day were you running do you think?

CS I'm sure that we, you know, ran 5 to 6 miles a day, which by modern day standards, you know, my girls cross-country team does that, but at that time, that was a lot. But, we did a lot of different types of running, you know, catcher relays and over gravel piles and things like that where you start one team on one side of the gravel pile and the other team on the other side of it and you just run passing a baton. The baton could be an axe handle and you run until one team overtakes the other team. A relay... that means you shift every trip around so you go until the weak link... somebody folds on one team. [Chuckle]. It's a guessing game. It's a good conditioner.

SG What the other one... you said catch...?

CS That's the catcher relay, where you start 2 teams at opposite ends of a track or a pile, you know, or some sort of thing they got to run around and you just run until one team overtakes the other.

SG So, you had a lot of fun doing... during training?

CS I think so. I enjoyed it. You know, you get close to your other... the other guys you're training with and, ah....

SG Do you think that's where that esprit de corps develops... during training or is it something that develops more towards... later in the season?

CS Sure. I think it develops... you know, the rookies, you got to stick together. And then finally, when you get out on a fire, then you get to meet the squad leaders and finally find out, yeah, these guys are human, too. They held a pretty stern face, I think, through the training. They didn't associate with us very much, which I thought was a mistake, but that's... everybody's got his or her way of teaching, and that was their way. They thought it was better for them to stand off a little bit. But, on a couple fires I... you know, you said you were going to talk to Jim Fritz next week, ah, Ron Fritsch [Ronald L.], probably gave Jim Fritz as hard of time during training as
anybody but it just so happened the first fire that Jim Fritz had, it was a two manner with Ron Fritsch and Jim Fritz just walked Ron right into the ground. Coming off that fire, Ron Fritsch says, "Boy, this Fritz guy is tough, you know." All the crap that he had been giving poor Jim for 4 weeks... all of a sudden, boy, they're... they're good friends.

SG I keep hearing a lot about... pardon me.

CS It turned around, you know.

SG Why was he giving Jim such a hard time?

CS I don't know. You know, it just happens that some guys catch more flack during training than other guys. You probably... you foul up one day and it sticks in... it sticks in the instructors mind. It's just like with a class of kids, you know, I've had... here I got 300 new 7th graders... well, the only ones I know are the guys that have fouled up so far... they've done something wrong. [Chuckle]. I don't know the guys that have been doing everything right. That's the way it is when you're training a new group of people. That's not saying that Jim fouled up but somehow he got... might have gotten on Ron's wrong side somewhere in that period of time.

SG Do you remember getting a nickname during those early days?

CS Not during the early days. You know, they called me the Red Rabbit, ah, later on. That's because I always insisted upon running during training, so, I think that's where that came from.

SG Red Rabbit.

CS Red Rabbit, yeah.

SG When did you get that nickname?

CS Probably when I started training people... when I was a squad leader.

SG Lets see, so, that first year you finished your training after... it took you about a month and was a... tell me about your first training jump. What was that like?

CS Oh, I don't really remember much about the jump and I think... yes I do. My first training jump, I had a malfunction, if you can believe that.

SG What do you mean my by a malfunction?

CS It was an inversion. You know, there's a couple of types of malfunctions. The line overs, which are the most serious but this was an inversion so after all the training, I looked up and my chute had opened backwards. The steering, the tails, and the slots were in front, so I was going backwards and I don't know...
how I did it. Somehow I handled it and I had landed within the 50 foot circle even with an inversion. So, boy, I got high marks and all that. I think it was probably more accident than anything else. But, yeah, I remember I had an inversion my first jump. My first jump was my first airplane ride, so, I think that was more memorable than the jump itself. I think that, ah, all through my first couple of years, the jump was so automatic. I felt that I was probably a robot. I just did everything the spotter told me to do... step 1, step 2, step 3. The airplane ride was probably what most carried me... the thrill, whatever.

SG How did you feel on that first airplane ride?

CS OK, until we got up and... you know, we got up in the air and everything was pretty good and I said, "This is OK." We were in the Twin Beech and you're sitting on the floor. Anyway, you can't even see out what little windows they have until the spotter pulled the window out of the floor. Then all of a sudden, you know, here we are. Wow! That's a long way down. Again, I think all rookies... you just react by rote, you know. I felt that I would have jumped into the Pacific Ocean, probably if they would have said, "Go." No thought... no nothing. Whereas I felt, and I really felt... even maybe for the first couple of years I jumped, I was that way. Until down in New Mexico in '61, we jumped so much down there, I felt that, boy... I got a little bit more discerning about where I'm going to jump. And all of a sudden started figuring out... "Hey, we'd better figure out where we're going to land, which way's the wind blowing, where's the fire worst, where's the trail on the way out, where are we going to drop the gear..." Everything that you could cram into your mind in 30 seconds as opposed to a rookie jumper who just follows the man out in front and follows the orders and that sort of thing.

SG How many... how long... you were down in Silver City. When did you feel like you were confident enough to start looking at all those other things? How many years of jumping did you have...?

CS That was my third year I was down there. So, maybe that doesn't say a lot for me my first 2 years. I just followed rote instructions but I felt... I jumped so much that season... I had 26 fire jumps that season which was a lot back in... at that time. I had 17 in Silver City and 9 when I got back to Oregon, so, that summer was just one of, fire, after fire, after fire. It seems like it was busy, busy, busy.

SG That was your rookie year?

CS That was my third year. That was '61, yeah.

SG How may jumps did you get in your rookie year?

CS 7 training and 3 fire.
SG  What was your first fire jump like?

CS  Four man fire on the, ah... on the Siskiyou. Very steep country. That type of country you see in the Siskiyou is very brushy... high brush... the drone type. The fire was probably as big as this room here. No real problem there. It was the packout. The wing... what I did, I was probably about 150... 155 pounds and the pack is a large percentage of your body weight. On the last training jump, we had a heck of a pack back to the base. You know, 7 or 8 miles, but it was so hot there. It was like a 110 in the Illinois Valley. When I got back my feet were hamburger, so, it was new boot time. The first packout I had from the fire was about the same way... shock wise. I said, "God all mighty, this is tough." This... we were packing out at nighttime... we were packing along the Rogue River. The trail was very narrow. I could hear the river roaring off to my right somewhere. [Laugh]. It seemed like the squad leaders... that the squad leader, and the other experienced person, just put their head down and went like a bat out of hell. Here's myself and the other rookie, trying to keep up. I mean, you know, what is this, a race? A race out? I remember, ah... those packs seemed so heavy... not seemed, they were doggone heavy. They shifted balance... one time I fell off the trail and I felt like; this is a monumental achievement crawling up the side of the bank to get back on the trail. But, that's... yeah... so, there I remember my first fire jump.

SG  How much do you think the pack weighed?

CS  I think the packs weighed around a 100 pounds.

SG  What were the packs like? Did they have a frame internal to the pack or...?

CS  No internal... they were big canvas... oh, what we call an elephant bags. And we had just a standard military pack. The type that heavy equipment, ah... automatic weapons and that sort of thing... mortors would be carried on. It was a standard military pack frame. And the packs were laced on the packs... not laced, they were hooked on with rubber bands and the rubber bands were innertube tires.

SG  So, did you wind up carrying most of the weight on your shoulders or on...?

CS  Yeah, if you packed it high which, you know, you soon learn to do. You carry it on your shoulders.

SG  The packout sounds like, a....

CS  There's... there's a key to it. You suffer as a rookie, and you get better your second year, you know. You pack them quicker. Then years later, when I was a squad leader, I remember packing out... and they were tough, but here's the 180...190 pound rookie who's obviously much bigger, much stronger, and that
guy's just sweating blood back there. So, I don't know what it is. You're either used to it or you handle yourself a little different.

SG What kind of attitude do you think you have to have to get through that packout? It seems...?

CS I don't know. You have to just put your mind in neutral. It seems like some... we never saw helicopters in Cave Junction. We packed all the time. It seems like... they were cross country, they were through brush, and it, ah... they were just long and it was torture, in my mind. I hated that... during the packout, you probably quit 5 times. I'm never doing this again. I'm quitting when I get back and that's the end of it. I'm going back to the District. And then you get back and you have a meal and a shower and you're ready to go again. Then you cuss your way through the next packout. It's just a... it's a funny attitude, though. Well, hold on... I remember that Ron Fry said, when we first started training, he says, "You're going to see beautiful country." He says, "You're going to jump it..." and you do jump in beautiful country. You jump in country where probably few people have ever walked before. He says, "The packouts... they're going to be great. You're going to see beautiful country." Well, that's... that's all bullshit. What you see is 2 feet in front of you in the trail. You see nothing but 2 feet of dirt in front of you in the trail. You never get to raise your head. At least it seemed that way.

SG And people race?

CS That was always kind of crazy. I... that's probably a macho thing that didn't need to be tossed in there. Racing out on the packout was some of... one of the more ridiculous things that were... but it's done.

SG And it was always... for the years that you were down there, was [it] always packing out as fast at you could go?

CS It seemed like it, yeah.

SG You'd think you would be pretty tired after fighting fire for a while?

CS I figured, when I led a packout, that we would eventually get out, and we would all get out at the same time, and we would all get out in one piece.

SG Any packouts that you remember that weren't too bad... that you did have a good time on?

CS Oh, yeah... yeah. There's always short ones. You'll find the trail sometimes. Other times you don't find the trail. I think Northern California is crummy country to pack through because it's brush and there's brush... its 8... 9 feet. And a 2 mile packout through a brush pile can be many times worse than
a 10 or 12 mile packout on a trail, say, up in the Lake Chelan area, where you did get to see some pretty country.

SG Do you remember any injuries that first year? Anybody get hurt?

CS No I don't. I don't really recall. That's something that's always impressed me about jumping, was the fact that the potential for injury is there but, ah... there's not that many. It seemed like in '61, we were real busy. When I got back from New Mexico, that year we bunged up quite a few people, percentage wise, because we were a real small crew. Like we had 3... 3 guys I think in Grants Pass with broken backs at one time. Seemed like we ought to have had one half the ward in there. That was the compression type where their chutes would collapse and they free fell into the ground, you know, 30... 40 feet and landed feet, rear end, sort of a thing. The worst thing about the Southern Oregon area is the trees. That's compared to the other Regions. The trees are so doggone big down there that they just... they're out of hand.

SG Out of hand. [Laugh]. Did you get any kind of special training for trees that were so big?

CS No. You just get a longer rope. [chuckle]. Which I thought, "Boy that's great. You get a 150 foot rope. And I've heard... I have never been in that situation, but I dropped a guy who, the 150 foot rope... why, he yelled down to his partner, "Can you see my rope, Phil?" And Phil says, "What rope?" So, the 150 foot wasn't even visible. He was... it was Dave Towers, who lives down in the Sonoma area now. You said you're going down to Nampa in a couple of days. Dave is the representative from McGraw Hill down there. And that was the first fire I spotted as a trainee spotter and Dave made me look bad by hanging up so high that, on a cargo run, I remember looking out the door getting ready to shove the cargo and we went by the tree and there was Dave waving his streamer, you know, saying, "Yeah, I'm OK." I'm looking straight ahead on a cargo run and there's this guy staring... so, that's how high he was. He was, like, a good 230 feet in the air, it seemed like.

SG How did he ever get down?

CS He climbed down to the lowest limb and tied off there and made his let down.

SG So, you think that might have been why those 3 jumpers had a problem with the compression injuries?

CS Yeah, I think so. It's just real thick tree, and big tree country. Although the height of the trees had nothing to do with their injury. The fact that, you know, trees are big though, they tend to not hang up as well in a large tree as you do a smaller one.
SG So, you never got hung up yourself?

CS Very few times. I've really prided myself on my steering. I felt that, that's survival. [Chuckle]. I hate... out of all the phases of the training, the thing I hated the most was tree climbing. I am not a good tree climber. I hate it. I despise it. I carried a "fano" saw in my personal gear bag. I always said if I hung up big... 200 feet or so in that area there, that I would retrieve my chute before I even left that tree. I would never go back up that thing. But, I think I only hung up over a 100 feet one time, and I did jump 8 years at Cave Junction, so, yeah, I was either lucky or some combination of....

SG Just must have had good steering... must have been.

CS I worked all the way to the ground. I put it that way and at 150 pounds, I would always take a rock patch over a patch of trees. I figured I could walk away from a rock patch. It's the big guys... the 190 pounders... I think the weight limit was 185 or 190 but it seems like they must have starved... a few of them must have starved to get in at that because what was it... their second year they came back at over 200. But those guys headed for the trees... survival.

SG That's interesting. So, they didn't mind hanging up in those real high trees... that was not... or that they preferred it to...?

CS I don't think they were looking for high ones. They were looking for something, ah, less high. Less high than the big ones and higher than a rock pile. The big guys and the rocks, that... that was injury for that.

SG So, you didn't mind landing on rocks?

CS Not at 150 pounds. I came down pretty light.

SG Did you do a lot of stretching and things of that sort when you were working as a jumper?

CS I don't remember that. I'm not big into stretching. Even my cross-country kids, I don't stretch that... that much. I tell them, "Hey, we're runners, we're not gymnasts... stretch at home tonight."

SG So, it never seemed like people would ever get out of shape during the season very much. They kind of always stayed...?

CS I think we were really fitness oriented and that was before fitness was a big deal. We had a lot of guys that lifted before lifting was an "in" thing. We had a lot of guys that ran. The hiring at Cave Junction at that time... there were not all the government quotas, and so forth, the hiring seemed to be done... if you went home in winter time and had a good friend who had some fire experience, it was hiring friends of jumpers who were
all ready there. And it seemed like, "Wow, we got quality." We really got quality that way, because who would ever go home... Nobody wanted to recommend anybody that turned out to be a dud. That would be the last thing you would want to do, is recommend a guy to be a jumper and have him washout. So, the quality people we were getting was great, I thought. Had a lot of brothers, you know. One brother would start and here'd come another brother and that sort of thing.

SG Had a lot of family then in the jumpers.

CS Yeah we did. We did. We had the 3 Welch brothers [Bernie, Gary E., Larry D.], from Texas, and we had Garry and Larry Peters, from Lakeview and... I'm not... I don't think... I know Gary's still flying for the Forest Service down in Region-6.

SG Were a lot of the people from the Forest Service. Is that where they got their fire experience or...?

CS I don't think, ah, we had... yeah, we had a mixture of Forest Service and State people in the... the requirements weren't as stringent at that time, or at least the research wasn't as good. I think... some applications were... I've heard rumors that I could substantiate that even an application or two might have been made up over a sixpack, but.... A whole seasons worth of fire experience just came out of the blue. But if you recommended that sort of person, you knew that he was going to turn out good.

SG If he didn't have real extensive fire experience was that something he could learn before he went up?

CS Sure. I think the key to jumping was... was physical experience. Physical... having the physical ability and the mental attitude to get along with the people, in that unit. You've got to be a real... I say, you've got to be a team type person and still jumpers are as big of, individuals as I've ever seen in any line of work, too. That's hard... they... you know, what I mean, it looks like it's converse to what I'm saying... you got to be a team player but you got to be an individual but that's the type of person, I felt, I ran into as a jumper. A real team person but at the same time... you know, in looking back, I never jumped with these people but I know that the first person to climb Mt. Everest from the west slope was Dr. Willy Unsoeld, and he was a Cave Junction jumper. I can not tell you the name of the man, [Stuart Roosa, Apollo 14 Crew-member] but the man who flew the Command module around the moon on the second one was a Cave Junction jumper. You know, this was probably... will come out in some of your notes there if you talk to some of the CJ jumpers in '50... '53 through '56... in that area there. So, these are real individual type people.

SG So, you felt like that was the common thread? That was the thing that seemed to bring people together?
CS Yeah, if you could call... you know, is that a common... I don't know. They were individuals but they came together for jumping. I guess, in a smaller Base like this, all our fires were 2 man fires than 4 man fires. Here I jumped 8 years at Cave Junction and I barely even saw a DC-3. I didn't know what a... hardly knew... the largest fire I had, ever had was an 8 man fire. Well, if you talked to somebody out of Missoula, they'd laugh at you, you know. They've got fires with multitudes of jumpers outside of, you know, one fire I jumped in Missoula, ah... it ended up with over 60 or 70 jumpers... just a multitude. It was, ah... the Walt Disney movie they took the first... the shot of all the parachutes in the trees was taken on that fire and the name of the fire was the "Beetle Rich Fire In The Kootenai" and there was just a multitude of jumpers on that. But, outside of that, all we had down at Cave Junction were 2 man fires, and 4 manners. So, you got to be pretty close to your buddies under those circumstances.

SG Why do you think the fires were so small? Was it...?

CS It wasn't that the fires were so small, our aircraft was so small. Four people was a load and if you were lucky you got to make 2 loads out of it. The Twin Beeches, like, ah... cramming 4 guys into 8 feet of space it seemed like. You were... by the time you got fire packs and everything in there, there was just enough room for you, and that was it. It was a relief to get out of the aircraft. So, everything was a 2 or 4 manner.

SG Was it ever hard sometimes jumping with certain people. Did you prefer... was it ever a... a lot of personal things that would enter into it?

CS I never found that. You know, as the rotations go, sometimes you and don't say get stuck... you stick with a partner a couple of times before, somehow, you get broken out of the rotation and it's neat because you get to know people. Ah, I always felt, when I was a squad leader training rookies, it was neat to get out with a rookie on a 2 manner. Then you finally got to know this guy a little closer [that] you've been training for a month. But, I never found it difficult to jump with any particular individual. Even... you know, you go to another Base, like up to Winthrop and you're hesitant you'll get paired with a Winthrop jumper and, ah... you find out those guys are just as good. One of the best experiences I ever had was to go to New Mexico with 12 Missoula jumpers, 8 McCall, 2 Winthrop, and 2 Cave Junction. After a month down there, you felt like you've know those guys all your life.

SG So, being from different Bases, didn't make a whole lot of difference?

CS No, I've... you got the che... process... chitter chatter back and forth... "Hey, we're better than Redmond," and, "We're better than Missoula. And Missoula's, I'm sure, better than Cave Junction. That's all, you know, baloney. I found that, out
in Silver City, you can't tell one from the other. It's the same type of people jumping in Missoula, as are in Cave Junction. And as I say, Cave Junction was unique but that was the physical structure of the Base... the fact that it was smaller. It's not the difference in the type of person we attracted or anything like that.

SG Was Cave Junction one of the smallest Bases?

CS I'm sure it was. I... as a matter of fact, I know it was. Even Redmond, I think, was larger than Cave Junction.

SG Redmond isn't real far from Cave Junction, really. Why did they start the new base?

CS Redmond was more centralized and Cave Junction is way out in the middle of nowhere. It's down on highway 199 towards the coast. It's probably only about 50 air miles over the hill from the ocean. It was started back in 1943, and why they put it there, I don't know. It seems like when the government always chooses a place to put a Base... if you look at where they put their military bases, they put them in the most far out places. We always wondered why Cave Junction wasn't put in Medford where you at least could have a town where you could do something at night.

SG What did you wind up doing at night at Cave Junction?

CS Hum. Well, naturally, there must have been gallons of beer drunk, but we played a lot of softball down there, if you can believe that. When I was kind of the head squad leader, or foreman, whatever you want to call it there I just took everybody and put them on a softball team. So you didn't have to play softball but it was a good idea if you did. Softball players always got the better job assignments. Well, I knew it was good so I always had 2 teams in the city league there, the Jumpers and then our second team was Brand X. The Brand X was playing, we'd all... you'd use that as a... you'd go up there and the townies in a small town... the biggest thing in the world would be to beat the jumpers. Afterwards it would naturally develop into a few beers and a game of pool, and that was our social life.

SG What did the townies think of you as jumpers?

CS I think that there was a lot of animosity in Cave Junction toward jumpers that started back after the war in the '40's, when you got... you had the veteran coming back. I heard some really wild stories about the jumpers in the '40's. It's always... it's like any small town, when you got an influx of outside people moving into town, you got the college, university type person coming into a small town, and naturally, you got 24 jumpers all going around looking for a date from a very limited amount of girls. And you got the hostility of the local guys around town. But, I think over a period of years that when they started hiring more jumpers from the area itself, which I thought
was a good idea, then, just about the time I was leaving Cave Junction, I felt that the jumpers were really in tune with the townspeople and the townspeople were in tune with the jumpers. There's a lot of community projects... it seems like we would always go out and do something for the community if it needed volunteer labor, and help like that.

SG Did you do that on your own time or was that part of your project work?

CS No, that was on our own time and I remember a couple of times in training though, that we'd be running down the road, and a farmer would be bailing his hay. Well, shoot. We got 16 rookies, as part of our physical training, bamm-o, he'd have that... every bale in that field picked up in an hour and put on his truck and gone, sort of a thing. But, I think there... when I first started, there seemed like there was a lot of animosity. As I say, when I first came into town and asked where the jumper Base was, I could tell by the look of the guy, when he told me 7 miles south, that, "Not another one of you guys," sort of a deal.

SG Did that make it kind of hard to go into town, with those sort of...?

CS No. You just stayed with your own group and that sort of thing. I think the rivalry developed through softball and things like that was a good thing. That the guys that... the towns people tried to beat us and we tried to beat them sort of thing. Later on, a few of us who were coaches, ended up coaching. We coached the women's teams in the town and that helped out too. That has a lot of PR in that.

SG Good public relations, yeah. Did you notice a difference when first you start out you were a rookie and then you came back second year as a second year jumper and then you became a squad leader in your third year? Did you feel a big difference in the way you approached your job? Being a squad leader, did you have a different sense about your work?

CS I don't know whether I did or not. You know, it seems like the most knowledgeable person in any job, including smokejumping is the second year person, who knows everything. And then the more you get into it, the less you feel you know. You're more confident but you're not the "know it all". No I didn't see any real change. I felt that the one thing that we had at our base and that I still carry through with and believe in and teaching in, and everything else, is the real work ethic. I don't see that... I have never seen a work ethic as strong in any part of the Forest Service as I had [seen] at our Base. You know, we were very strict that... bingo, at 8 o'clock we went to work. You just didn't report to work, you started work at 8 o'clock. That means if you had tools and stuff and lunches to gather, all that was done because you started at 8, and you worked right to 5, and that's carried over a lot. I think there's a real strong work ethic.
SG Where do you think that work ethic came from?

CS Probably originated from Jim Allen, who was our Project Air Officer.

SG Did he make a big impression on you?

CS Yeah. He was one of the most outstanding people I've ever met, you know. I look back at bosses and Jim Allen, I would like to emulate him and....

SG What were his, ah...?

CS Characteristics?

SG Yeah, I don't want to say tricks. What was the key to get across that work ethic? How did he...?

CS I don't know. I don't know. Ah, leadership is a tough thing to break down because he was not the gung-ho yelling type leader... very quiet. He just commanded more respect and I think every Cave Junction jumper you talk to, you'd find out... that worked for Jim said he really commanded respect. He expected a lot. He got a lot out of his people.

SG Did he have a lot of meetings with you... a lot of personal contact?

CS No. Ah... naturally, you know, if you went up the line to become a squad leader, you did. As far as the... as far as the rookies, you know, we probably held Jim off and Jim worked in the palace down there... the head shed and we didn't get to see him much. You know, he walked through the day room on Sunday when we were watching the ball game and we'd bet... bet on the Yankees and we'd all bet against him and that sort of thing, but no... not a lot. It seemed like I worked for Jim for so long that, ah... a real lasting friendship.

SG Did he pick you as a squad leader?

CS Yeah.

SG Did you apply for that job as a squad leader or did he...?

CS No. It seemed like it's just something... you come back and, gee, one of the guys you're working with is a squad leader now. Really, when I came back from New Mexico, I though seniority wise that I might be a squad leader and I didn't get it the third year and, you know, I was a little disappointed but, I said, "Hey, my time will come." It came... it was really the fourth year that I was up there.
SG So, you said you weren't really a squad leader until your fourth year?

CS It was the last part of the third year, you kind of assume duties, but officially, you know, when you get your GS rating and that sort of thing, it was my fourth year there.

SG So, a squad leader's a GS...?

CS ... 7.

SG Did people that you trained with tend to stay? Were you working with a lot of the same people that you trained with as a rookie by your third or fourth year?

CS I... OK, rack my brain here. I don't think so because our rate of attrition is, you know, I've indicated, was pretty high... training 15... 12... 8 to 10 even, is a pretty good percentage for our Base. So, no... by the third year, a third year person, back then, was a real veteran. A fourth year person was a real veteran. Whereas now, talking to the guys at the reunion, you see the way guys are staying with jumping now. Holy Toledo, they stay on forever. But, back then, it just seemed like the turnover rate was higher. For what particular reason, I don't know.

SG So, you were a veteran by your third or fourth year and there weren't a lot of other people there that had been with you that first year, were you thinking that... what were you doing at that time? What were your career goals...?

CS About that time I was starting teaching.

SG So, you had finished school and you were actually teaching?

CS Yeah.

SG Smokejumping was just...?

CS A summer job. It was... Friday, school would be out and Monday I had to report to work. Friday would be the end of the season and Monday I would be back down here, so, I didn't have a lot of dead time.

SG Sounds pretty busy.

CS It was. It got to be a real challenge because I was... I would be moving a family up there too. So, wow, we'd pack and then hauling a U-haul to Cave Junction and struggling to haul a U-haul with our little Volkswagon, and getting up there and heading back down here before school was started again.

SG What did the people you work with think about you being a
smokejumper?

CS Oh, I think people were always interested. I know... here I was down... like, I was a rookie, or second year teacher down here and at one faculty meeting they asked me to show my slide presentation on smokejumping. I thought, geez, this does not relate to anything scholastically or faculty meeting wise. But, people were... great reception. They loved it.

SG So, they didn't have any unusual ideas about you since you were a smokejumper??

CS No.

SG What about your family?

CS Seems like they all grew up with it, so, ah... shoot my youngest son, who's now 22, grew up his first few years at the Smokejumper Base, so....

SG Did he ever try Smokejumping?

CS Nope... he fought fires on the crews I had down here for a couple of years and much to my disappointment, does not like to fight fire. [Chuckie]. Geez, you know, he's 190 pounds. He plays football and I said, "God almighty, why don't you get in the hotshot crew and go to jumping." Well, again, my... what I like... can't force on, you know... your kids aren't going to be the same. [Pause]. At Cave Junction, I trained with Ron and Larry Lufkin who are real good friends of mine. They are Francis Lufkin's sons and Francis was one of the original smokejumpers, so, that was neat. His 2 boys went into Smokejumping.

SG And you went... when did you work with them?

CS Oh, '60 with Ron and, ah... Larry, it's a good question. I think Larry came about '64 or so. Ron was the one of the ushers at my wedding and I was an usher at Larry's wedding, so....

SG So, you did form some lasting friendships?

CS Some real good friendships with the Lufkins, yeah.

SG Did you form any friendships that first year that you were working? The first year as a rookie, that carried through throughout all your years of jumping?

CS I'm trying to think if there's... there's people, I still know now, but nobody I'm communicating with. Although, you know, second and third years... Dave Towers, and... oh, OK, excuse me... Jim Fritz over... you're going to see at McKinleyville. You know, I'll drop in when I'm over there... he'll drop in when he's over here... that sort of thing.

SG Seems like a lot of strong friendships are formed among
jumpers.

CS I think so. Probably some of the strongest friendships you have, are guys you jump with. Like... OK, I'm trying to think of a fellow I started... teaches at Chico High School now, Keith Lockwood, jumped with me at Cave Junction... jumped with in Alaska... supergood friend.

SG It's one of the few occupations that I've noticed where people do seem to form real strong long lasting friendships. That must be... working as a jumper must be awfully intense. There must be something about it that's just, so bonding.

CS It must be that. It might be the type of job that it is that draws a particular person... combination of it both.

SG Can you think of another type of a job that would be as bonding as smoke jumping?

CS I don't know. I'm sure that, ah, people in the military that go through certain phases of that, where they're living and working together, establish those friendships. All though, I don't know, it seems like once military people break up, they... you know, they don't seem to see as much. It seems like jumpers... we're always calling somebody on the phone or along about Friday night you'll get a phone call from a drunken buddy that you hadn't heard from in 2 years and he's calling you collect from Chatom, Alabama, you know. You know, "Will you take a call from Chatom, Alabama." "Yeah. I know who it is, just put 'em on!" "Hi Charlie. How you doing,"... that sort of thing... I don't know.

SG Were you friendships on the... when you worked on the tanker crew... was the bonding as strong?

CS No! Definitely not. It was a job. Two guys from the tanker crew though, I went back and got them into smokejumping and I still keep in contact with those 2 individuals. It was sort of a... "Hey Chuck, you go try it, and if you make it, let us know what it's like." I came back with good reports and then the next year they applied.

SG Oh... you're getting the whole Region into smokejumping those years, didn't you.

CS That's it. I always tried to recruit... I recruited a certain amount of my student teachers as they came through here over the years. I felt that I probably had up to 5 or 6 people who student taught for me that I got on into smokejumping.

SG How did you recruit them? What sense did you get about them that made you think that they would be good jumpers?

CS If they work, you know, you're working is the same situation. You're working closely with the person in a training
situation over a period of half a year, if the person has... you know, whether they have the physical and the mental qualities to go with it, it just develop into whether they had had the fire background to actually qualify. Well, if they had had those, it's just a natural, "Hey, you ought to be jumping in the summertime." What a combination for a teacher and a jumper.

SG   Seems like a nice combination.

CS   It is... it's a good combination. You're working 2 jobs but it's not... it's not a job when you go up to go smokejumping... it's a break in your teaching year. And also, as a first year teacher, or second year, or any teacher up to, maybe, 8 or 9 years, you've got to have another job or you'll starve. Not physically starve but your salary is not as high as it should be in other professions, so, you got to be working in the summer doing something. Well, gee, what an ideal combination... smokejumping and teaching.

SG   Did you feel, like you weren't really working in the summer? You were getting paid...?

CS   Yeah, right... I was getting paid for doing something I loved.

SG   You didn't feel the work was real hard?

CS   Oh, the work was real hard but I enjoy hard work.

SG   So, you had a good time when you were being a jumper?

CS   Yep... loved it.

SG   Would you do it again?

CS   Oh, yeah. If I... I was going to jump until I was 85... I've had 4 knee operations on this one, and 1 on that one. So, after my last knee operation... I got it back from Alaska in '69, I was in the hosp... I was out of school for 3 months and bingo, that was the end of that and I thought, "Wow, I'll never get back in the fire again." So, I'm glad to come back into fire in the capacity I am now.

SG   The knees don't always hold up so well.

CS   Whoa.

SG   What about all those years you were at Cave Junction and also jumped down at Silver City, do you remember any fires that were particularly memorable, or any jumps that were particularly outstanding?

CS   I just remember, ah, I jump out of Cave Junction that I came... you always want to get back to your home forest which was the Lassen. We flew from Cave... Redding was out of jumpers. We
flew all the way from Cave Junction down to the Lassen. It was in a rainstorm, the pilot was lost. He was flying around trying to identify little towns and I said, "Hey, that is not so and so, that is so." I thought, "Boy, here I am, I'm telling the pilot what town is what town." And there's Gary Welch [Gary E.], and myself jumped it and we were just and "X" on a map. They hand you a map with a red "X" on it and that's where you are at and their instructions were to walk up the road, excuse me... walk up the hill a half mile to the road and hike down the road to the guard station. Well, our "X"... we were nowhere near where we were on the map and we left the fire and we walked through a brush patch... one of those California brush patches. I think we were... we fought our way through about 12... 13 hours, something like that... got absolutely nowhere. We ended up hiking back to the fire and digging up the food that we had buried. Back there, I guess, we weren't as ecology oriented as they are now because we buried [chuckle] all our garbage and stuff. We didn't pack it out. But, I said, "Geez, at least when we get back to the fire, we're going to have something to eat." We saw a lookout way off in the distance. I said, "That's the only way I know how to get out of here. We'll just... we'll just start hiking to that lookout if it takes us 3 days to get to it, we'll get out." So, we were out of water and we were in the middle of a brush patch and I put out a sign for water and I'll be doggone, I saw a helicopter, and I put a signal mirror and I must have flashed it in that guy's eyes until he was cussing me out. He landed and said, "What do you want?" I said, "Well, we'd like a way out of here to start with." So, yeah, I remember that one. That really stands out in my mind.

SG Does that happen a lot... being dropped and, you know, getting the map with the red "X" and often times...?

CS It happened in more than... more than often. Jumping out of Winthrop, one time, we knew where we were but we were dropped, and we were dropped about a quarter to a half mile away from the fire and I talked to the spotter and said, "Put our cargo on the fire." In Cave Junction, we cargo with little bitty chutes that... because of the trees, they never hung up. They were just a bomb chute and our pack was just a projectile. It hit the ground but up there in Winthrop, they put our packs on a 24 foot chute and we got to the fire and all our gear was up in the tree and they dropped no climbers and they flew off and left us. So, that fire there consisted of... we used our hard hats to scrap a fire line, and our pocket knives... it was about a snag, say 14 inches around and we had to cut it down with our pocket knives and a let down rope we finally pulled it over with and we had no food. Everything was up this tree and it was like 70 to 80 feet before there were any limbs on the tree, so, we couldn't... we couldn't crawl up any limbs and it was too big around. Gee, it was gigantic. We couldn't get up, so, we were like the Flintstones on that fire there. I got so hungry, I... I was started eating berries and then my partner started giving me all this folklore bit about berries that don't have a thorn or... he's got confused. I said, "Hey, OK, Dave, I'll tell you what...
if I'm dead in the morning, don't eat the berries. That's yours... you can be safe but I'm eating the berries, I'm starving."

SG Why didn't they drop the climbers?

CS That's a good question. We got back and we asked the spotter that, as we [inaudible] them out later. He kind of laughed it off and he says, "Oh, we dropped your climbers." So, I guess they did but, ah, you know, a pair of climbers in a brush patch of the side of the mountain... we had no idea where they were. It was a... that was memorable experience, I'll put it that way. We had to pack out, we had nothing to carry our gear in other than a seamless sack, so, here we are... we're hiking cross country with a seamless sack over our shoulder and no harness. Well, we were wearing our harness and our reserve because all of it wouldn't fit into the seamless sack. We were dragging our tools. We must have looked like Ma and Pa Kettle, or... [Chuckle]. It was different. Fortunately that didn't happen too many times. But, I think getting mislocated on a map... it happens every now and then. You can't do the job more than a couple years and that happens.

SG Did you feel very proficient with your compass and map... skills at figuring out the environment when you're landed in that?

CS Yeah, we were at the top of a drainage and I figured sooner or later, we knew Lake Chelan was at the bottom of that drainage and we'll get out. I don't know when but, [chuckle] we will get out.

SG In situations like that, do you remember if you felt a... how did you sort of deal with it mentally? Was it something you made into a game kind of or was it something where you had to numb your head and you just kind of make everything mechanical or how...?

CS No... I think... shoot, we're going to get the fire, number 1. Number 2, we're going to get all our gear out if we got to drag it down piece by piece. And that was... that was it. You're trained never to come back without any piece of gear. You never leave anything... you take it all with you, so....

SG Determination.

CS Yeah, we were going to get out. We figured, if nothing else, somebody might come looking for us [chuckle] one of those days.

SG Any particular... really bad fires that you had that you kind of... maybe a little scary or...?

CS Not really. I felt that, you know, we... most the fires that we had in Cave Junction were 2 and 4 manners. The only 8
man fire I've ever been on was one I thought we did the best job in our life. We jumped a fire on the Klamath. It was crowning at the time. There was 4 of us and I asked for 4 more and 8 of us put out a super raging fire, I thought. We just worked all night on that thing and we had it out by the next morning. The next morning they just started bringing in multitudes. Helicopters were coming in with... like, they brought in 100 guys on this thing. And we had it... they got there and it was out. So, that....

SG That must have been a nice feeling.

CS That was not any life threatening thing, but I felt it... boy, that was... talk about effectiveness of jumpers and aerial attack on fire.

SG Do you remember getting any feedback from the smokejumpers about doing that kind of work getting, you know... getting that fire out? Did you get anything beyond your own personal satisfaction? People talk about it?

CS No... no, not really. I think that many times when we went out on fires that you were always looking to cover your rear... that a lot of the District people were waiting for jumpers to foul up on a fire. You had to do a super job. If there were... it seemed like there were always some FMO's or somebody that, you know, wanted you to walk off and leave a little hot spot that they could come in and find later, so... I don't know whether that was a realistic thought or not, or if that was just something that was drummed into us to make us do a better job.

SG Was it hard to work with people in the District? Or, working with, sort of, [inaudible].

CS Some people, yeah... some people, I thought. The regular ground pounders who you met coming in and going out from a fire was no problem at all, I thought. Again, some of the District FMO's who may have been frustrated in their attempts to be jumpers [chuckle] somewhere along the line were, maybe, a little hard on jumpers. But still, at the same time, you know, I'm... should be... some of them... we had some District people that were just super. They would... their first request on any fire would be for jumper, so, there's the other side of the coin, too. I know we had one fellow on the Siskiyou up there that his first request was... went right to the jumper Base. We'd be racing the trucks. I've been trying to kick guys out the door and seeing a truck coming down the road and shorten up the run just to almost make it a complete circle. We never stopped banking. I'd just keep throwing guys out. [Laugh]. I'd say to the first man, "You're the streamer and the next 3 get ready to go. We've got to beat the pickup there."

SG Maybe it was kind of a... sounds like a... almost, for the most part a healthy competition.
CS Oh, yeah... definitely.

SG But, you're both in fire suppression, yet with the... did you work a lot with ground pounders, or did they tend to work on different phases of the fire than you did?

CS You would hit them... sometimes you'd hit them and ground people would come in and relieve you, but a lot of ours were so far back that, you know, ours was the final word. "We'll meet you at the road or meet you at the station." Or hike out to road and throw your gear back in a bush and mark it with a streamer, and hitchhike to the nearest town and tell them you're there, sort of a thing.

SG What about after you finished... while you worked at Cave Junction until, what... '66?

CS '66, yeah, then I went to Alaska.

SG Why did you [inaudible] coming back that you got the opportunity to go to Alaska?

CS There was a change in overhead and Jim Allen left to Redmond and I just wanted to try something new. I'd been at Cave Junction 8 seasons, and seemed like we were seeing quite a few guys going to Alaska. We had quite a few guys going to Air American in the early '60's, too, and they were coming back to Alaska.

SG What is Air America?

CS That was the CIA's operation over in Laos at the time. It seemed like we had a bunch of Cave Junction guys over there and they were finishing up their Air America and they were coming back to Alaska and I wanted to get back together with some of those guys I hadn't seen in quite a while. I put in an application. I wanted to go to Fairbanks, I got accepted at... on the Anchorage District at McGrath as a foreman. I thought, "Wow, that's really super. Here's a job they're offering me at $11,000 a year to be foreman." I got up there and I found out that McGrath... this is on tape... McGrath was the... was the biggest collection of misfit jumpers that I'd ever seen in my life. Everybody who had probably been drummed out of every jumper Base in the United States was jumping at McGrath. That was... "F-Troop" and "Hogan's Hero's" all put together. It was... I tried to make order... I'm really an orderly person, and I think I have a good work ethic and I was peeing into the wind when I was at McGrath. It was an absolutely hopeless situation.

SG So, you were the foreman out there?

CS Yeah. If it wouldn't have been for the Missoula jumpers I had... their squad leader and the 6 Missoula jumpers, I'd have gone nuts that year.
SG What was making everybody... what was so crazy about it?

CS McGrath, you got a people... really individuals. Everybody's... the team thing that you found out about jumpers was not there. The physical conditioning was not there. Ah... the idea of fighting fire in Alaska was to jump and immediately become an administrator and start calling for supplies and natives to do the job. That was different than I knew as a fire fighter. My idea of a jumper, you hit the ground, you started working. It's a different type of fire fighter in that situation up there. I did not... I insisted, you know, I want people to work at 8 o'clock. Well, you couldn't even get them out of the bed at 8 or 9 or 10 o'clock. That's not jumpers, as we know jumpers. I said, "That's fine. If you can't fire these people, I won't pay them." But, then you got an area manager over here who says, "Hey, we'll pay them anyway." So, they were ingrained people who had been there a period of years and I was coming in as an outside foreman and it was kind of radical changes. So, I went to Fairbanks... my next 3 years were... things were more legitimate... like a legitimate jumper base and a super operation. Bob Webber and Bill Robertson ran a real good show there at Fairbanks.

SG Did you go to Fairbanks as a foreman?

CS Went as a squad leader. Yeah. I was a master parachute rigger, so I spent much of my time in the loft there. At Cave Junction, I developed a philosophy that any work in the shade was better than any work in the sun, so. At Cave Junction we picked gobi stones. That was digging the rocks and we dug a lot of rocks at Cave Junction, so after digging a few rocks my first couple of weeks there, I decided, boy, I want to be a parachute rigger. I even found I have a good talent. I spend many hours at a sewing machine.

SG Did you get the option to pick what sorts of things you could get... special things?

CS Yeah, yeah... at Cave Junction, I wanted to become a rigger and then later on, when I was loft foreman there at Cave Junction, I really prided myself in that I had probably 80... or 90% of the crew there, seeing how it was a small base, trained as a rigger, because that makes you much more effective whenever you go anywhere. If you're a trained rigger, if there's overtime to be had, you can get it. If we go to Missoula, if we go to McCall, if we go to Winthrop in a fire bust situation, what do they need the most... who's the person that's going to get to work all night... the qualified rigger will get to work all night. They always need someone. My first year in Alaska, before I got to McGrath, fortunately, I got hauled off the plane and stuck in Fairbanks 3 weeks before I went to McGrath, I got pulled into the loft and it was chaos up there. You could jump 24 hours a day. There was no night for you to catch up, and they were running out of parachutes. I said... you know, I said, "What can you do?" I said, "Send me 6 of my riggers from Cave
Junction up." This shows how BLM... money means nothing to BLM but on Pan Am, the next morning I had 6 riggers coming up... 3 from Cave Junction, 3 from Winthrop. We went to work and we just... the first shift we pulled was 24 hours straight and we were turning out a parachute every 15 minutes off of 3 tables there for 24 hours. We were flying.

SG Why does BLM run such a different operation?

CS I don't know whether different. They... the finances are completely different. I even see that last summer... I was on BLM fires. There was more money, more equipment. I don't know whether that's good or not because, to me, they waste a lot more money, too, and I'm a tax payer. The Forest Service is tight with their money... very tight. BLM seems to be more loose with their money. One of the things that... at squad leader meetings in Fairbanks, I would say, "Well, boy, if we do this, we could save money here, and if we do this, we could save here." "Hey Chuck, you're not working for the Forest Service, anymore, calm down." You know, "We don't have to do that."

SG Was it more relaxed working up there... or maybe not relaxed... maybe more laxed in some areas?

CS Some areas but not... I can't... I thought it was a pretty doggone efficient organization. It was so much bigger than what I was used to. My god, they were... the fires and the number of... you know, here... county of Missoula jumpers and stuff, they might have 130... 40 jumpers on a roster going 24 hours a day. Well, what a logistics problem that is. The amount of cargo, and men, and personnel, far exceeded anything we had ever done in my setting at Cave Junction. You know, we're small potatoes compared to something like that.

SG As a squad leader, did you have to make a big adjustment?

CS Yeah... in the way I fight fires. The way I fight fires was, myself and 3 other guys and as I say, grabbed the ground... grab your pack when you hit the ground and go to work and just bust ass. Whereas up there you are in many cases an administrator on a fire. You are a fire boss. You sit back and start figuring out how many helicopters you're going to need, how many Indian crews you're going to need, line sector bosses and that sort of thing. I found that hard to handle because I had not been trained that way.

SG What about the other jumpers? Did they also become administrators? You as a squad leader probably became more of an administrator than the jumper themselves, also?

CS Oh, yeah... yeah. There were second and third year jumpers up there that were fire bosses handling large quantities of materials and men.

SG So, you often worked with a lot of the Indian crews?
CS Yeah... very impressed with those people.

SG They did a pretty good job?

CS Um hum.

SG Was that a major form of employment in Fairbanks?

CS Yeah... in Alaska. At least it seemed like it to me. It seemed like the money that came into Alaska either came in through fire or military. I don't know whether it was a government ploy... it's easier to give somebody a fire check and they feel like they're doing something other than unemployment. I question in my mind a lot the usefulness of fighting fire in Alaska, in many cases.

SG Really?

CS Well, here you're fighting a 30 to a 100 acre fire you could control whereas over the hill, here's the 100,000 acre fire that you can't control. In some... I don't know whether it was '67 or '68, we had a tough time even finding a fire small enough that we could dump 14 guys on to stop, there were so many fires. Alaska is immense.

SG Do they have any kind of a let burn policy?

CS I'm sure they do now. I've talked to some... ah, met last summer after the reunion, I ran into some of the Alaska jumpers who were down here looking at the California Division of Forestry and they've changed things quite a bit up there. Mike Clarkston probably has one of the most physical training programs now of any jumper base, in talking to Mike. In Alaska, physical fitness was not the thing. You know, coming from Cave Junction where... 2 hours a day up to Alaska where they wouldn't even play volleyball for pushups, was a big change for me. But now, Mike... from what I hear is just one of the toughest programs around.

SG This is up in Fairbanks?

CS Yeah.

SG Have you heard anything about McGrath? Is that still...?

CS McGrath has been phased out. There's no longer an Anchorage District. All fires comes out of Fairbanks now. From what I understand, jumpers are running all the fire positions in Alaska now. When I left up there the trend was, "Hey, smokejumpers are going to be obsolete. As soon as these helicopters get back from Vietnam, they're going to fly around with Navy crews and fight every fire in Alaska and you guys will be out of a job." Now there's 3 times as many jumpers in Alaska... permanent, as the 30 or so that were on when I was up there. So, jumpers have not
gotten smaller. They've gotten bigger. They're doing more. They're in higher positions and they're running the show from what I understand.

SG Do you think that might be a place where jumpers can advance?

CS Sure do. Sure do. If I was going to be a career government person, I'd be a BLM smokejumper.

SG What kind of a... is there something different about people that want to go up to Alaska? Something different about jumpers or is that another adventure?

CS No... no. Right, that's just another place. I thought, if I would have stayed in jumping it would have been kind of neat to come from Alaska to jump in Missoula a couple of years, to jump in McCall... try out some different bases... meet some different people.

SG You must have met a lot of people in all those years you jumped?

CS I felt like I did, yeah. I run into... it's funny, on the fires I had my crews on Nevada last summer, outside of Carson City, this big fire which was just going to pot, the fire boss on the fire was Bob Webber, who I hadn't seen in 15 years, in Alaska. So, it was neat. "Hey Bob, how you doing?" Of course that time you don't get to talk to the fire boss very long but I was on the fire for 2 weeks with my crews, and... shoot, we sat down over a cup of coffee and it was great. I got to talk Bob into keeping my 4 organized crews from Chico on that fire. We stayed over there 2 weeks and everybody else got sent home. And that worked for my people. I felt good about that.

SG Any particularly memorable fires in Alaska, or jumps?

CS Not up there. It just seemed like you either had a fire you could control, or it was just completely out of hand.

SG And then you just...?

CS Backed off and put your gear where it wouldn't burn. I felt... well, I fire we jumped, was absolutely ridiculous to jump it. I thought at the time, I was fire boss on this thing and it was a 92,000 acre fire. [Laugh]. Now, does this make good sense? No. And I... I think I was trying to [inaudible] this fire boss. I said, "This is ridiculous. There's no way to fight this thing. The one thing that will stop it will be rain... will be when it is rained upon." They still insisted... in my mind I've always been... I've been conscious of spending money. I don't like to waste taxpayer money. I said, "This is stupid." So, you know, we're pulled off and in comes all the overhead team and they play the game for 3 weeks and what happens... the thing that stops it... rain. We could have... I've always got a feeling and I
think I am a good person to work for a taxpayer. I'm conscious of a dollar. I can't cheat my employer. I feel that way with my teaching, too.

SG Did you see a change in the periods that you worked from when you started at Cave Junction, through your period in Alaska, A change toward people maybe pushing for more overtime or maybe hanging out on fires longer than need be, or like in Alaska, being on a fire when obviously there's nothing you could do about it?

CS Yeah. I think... it seemed to me, like... and this is a period I can't speak to, in the '70's, it seemed like things were more lax from just communications I got from people who I kept in contact with. I don't know... when I was in Alaska, we didn't have to worry about overtime because, ah, we worked 7 days a week, 10 hours a day. From Cave Junction, we never saw overtime. We were probably the best buy the government had. They never paid us standby. We never heard of standby and still we would sit there all weekend hoping for a fire. But Alaska, my gosh, I made as much my first paycheck in Alaska, as I did half a summer in Cave Junction. It got to be so in Alaska, if you wanted a day off, you had to take a day of sick leave. You... so, there was no problem about... I cannot see anybody milking a fire in order to get overtime because it was there anyway. What you would do, if you wanted to milk a fire and stay around a day or 2 extra, would be once so you could stay out and get a little rest. If you had a good 2 or 4 manner [chuckle] and you want to finally take a break from all the fatigue and just go, go, go, would be great to kick back on the fire. I think that happened a little bit.

SG During that time when you worked for that period in the summer, could you collect unemployment when you were done?

CS I don't know. I never thought about it.

SG That's something now days that somethings....

CS I'm against... OK. Philosophically I wouldn't do that. Period. I just don't agree with that.

SG I wasn't sure when that came in but it seems now days that's, ah... that's part of the job.

CS Yeah, it seems like it and even on my fire fighters in the organized crews, I'm getting things from the Department of Employment... the EDD asking... and they're collecting unemployment and I'm questioning how can you be an emergency fire fighter and collect unemployment. I just don't agree with that, so, but to each his own.

SG So, you're seeing that enter into your crews now?

CS Pardon me?
SG Well, let's see... after you stopped jumping then you started working on the...?

CS On these organized crews. The people that are working for me now are doing that. I know... I guess there were jumpers when I was jumping, that collected unemployment in the winter. I was never unemployed, so, I never had the opportunity, or I don't think I'd take advantage of it. I feel that I could find a job anytime.

SG What about the Vietnam War? That was entering into the picture during the time that you were working. Do you think that had any effect on the way the jumper organization was run... the effect on the kinds of people that were becoming jumpers?

CS I can't say because we were losing people as they were drafted and went into the service, but I don't think I was active in Cave Junction when we started getting people back. I was in Alaska and it didn't really have any effect up there. I didn't see any change in attitudes. I heard... in the early '70's maybe, the attitude became a little more loose, like... ah, I'm just looking... OK. People began to question authority more. Can the government do this to us? But, when I started, we would not question that. OK, that may be good... may be good to question authority. But, there's some bad things about that, too. It tears down your organization a bit, too. I think there's a way to question authority.

SG How does it effect what you do as a jumper when you feel that someone is questioning authority? Like you talked about when you first went into training, how authoritarian it was and militaristic...?

CS I think... if you're questioning the way the operation is run that it tears down a little bit from the discipline and the tight closeness that you... that you need to run an organization.

SG Do you think that also breaks down the bonding, or does that stay...?

CS I think it would but again I can't... I can't really pin that down because I... if I'd been jumping from '70 to '76 and in there, I think maybe I would have seen some more of these type of attitudes... I don't know. It's just nothing I could pinpoint.

SG Well, are there any other special things about smokejumping that we haven't talked about that you feel like you'd really like to have mentioned, or any...?

CS No. Why... you know, we've talked quite a while. It's easy to talk about smokejumping. It... you probably find that in every interview that it's no problem at all to sit and talk to a jumper for hours on end. Ah....

SG Each jumper has his own perspective on what was happening on
leadership, on how the organization itself was run, the effects of having different kinds of changes in overhead and that sort of thing and you've been in jumping for so long. While you were in jumping, you jumped 11 years?

CS Yeah.

SG And that give you kind of a unique place in seeing how the changes affected the rookies coming in, and their veterans that stayed....

CS I just feel, you know, I say that smokejumping is one of the best things I've ever done in my life. Ah, I always consider myself a smokejumper. You know, I'll still wear the tee shirt or the hat or whatever like that, you know, I'm just not active. If I ever meet somebody on a fire or something or with the Forest Service, like I'm working now who's an ex-jumper, it just... almost immediately, I seem to... he has a little more credibility. How valid is that? I don't know but that's the way I feel.

SG What does jumping give you? Is jumping something where you feel that you as an individual have those kind of qualities toward having that kind of a work ethic and found an occupation that... a job that...?

CS I think that that job attracted a type of person who really had a good work ethic. I'm a strong believer in a work ethic and I think that jumpers attracted that type of person. You know, there's so many opportunities when you're working for yourself, there's nobody looking over your shoulder and obviously as jumpers, you do that. So, the pride that you put into that job is what you put into it yourself. You could do a crummy job or you could do a good job and I don't think anybody ever thought of doing a crummy job.

SG So, what do you feel like you got from being a smokejumper? What did it leave with you that you wouldn't have had if you hadn't done it?

CS A lot of friends and a tremendous background of experience.

SG That you're using now... still working in fire?

CS Yep... sure.

SG Do you think you will continue to work in fire?

CS Yeah... really do. I'm enjoying this crew program. Ah, it's just like teaching and coaching. I've been coaching for over 20 years now and it's the same thing. I'm going out an recruiting the best people I can, same as I do for a team. I train them, same as I do for a team. I outfit them. I take them to fires. Right now, I'm collecting their gear [laugh], which is a major pain in the butt, which is the same as coaching, too,
So, are you more personal with your people than when you were first trained? You talked a little bit about...?

I think so. I... although I do... I probably present a pretty stern exterior when I'm training people. I figure that they've got to prove themselves through the training. I like to run a tight ship on the training. I felt that when I first got into this organized crew program that one of the things I wanted to do was upgrade it, and go out and get a better type of person. I've taken a lot of my thoughts in fitness and physical abilities and put into this program. I definitely increased the physical end of the current on-call-organized-blue-card-fire-fighter in this program. They're people... I make the 2 days that they spend in the field portion of their training... we train them 40 hours... 16 in the class 24 in the field... I make those 2 days action packed.

I bet... I bet you do.

I like to keep them hopping because we get a more quality person at the end. And that's where the persons benefit too. When I first went out with these organized crews I got on fires and people had never been on a fire before and they didn't want to be there after a few days, but, a fire, you just can't fold up. Again, you're part of a crew. If 5 people want to home... 15 people have to work a heck of a lot harder. So, I think a lot of my attitudes for smokejumping has carried over into this crew program.

Sounds like you are especially into improvements.

Yeah... definitely does. I try to stress the fitness end of it. You know, I'm just sold on fitness as being a prerequisite for fighting fires... got to be. And getting along with people. You've got to be able to take everything with a grain of salt. I found out that smokejumpers were able to do that. They're able to roll through the raw deals and the good deals. [Laugh]. They still come out on top. So....

They're always smiling.

Yep.

Is there anything else you'd like to add?

That's it. I [inaudible] know I appreciate the time you guys are spending on this.

I think it really is our pleasure.

OK.

[END OF INTERVIEW]