KT This is Kim Taylor interviewing Roger Wolfertz at University of Montana Archives, July 22, 1984.

KT Can you give us a brief biographical sketch?

RW Starting from where and when?

KT Uh, where you were born and raised here?

RW Oh, all right, that far back, all right yeah.

RW Uh, May 27, 1929, born in Chicago, raised in Chicago through grammar school and high school, went off to Bowling Green University in 1947. Spent two years there, then transferred to University of Denver where I graduated in the spring of 1951. Went into the Air Force for four years. So backing up (laughs) you know I was in the Forest Service while... first of all when I was in high school 1947. [I] was with the blister rust campaign up in the pan handle of Idaho up in Priest River. It was about, oh, 50 miles out of Priest River in a tent camp, and uh, three of us from high school went up there that summer of '47. We were on about three fires as ground pounders, the longest one was about two weeks and it was fourteen hour days for two weeks, either at the head of the fire controlling it or around the perimeter and into the perimeter cooling it off by turning earth over all day, and knocking sparks out of stumps and things like that. That's where I heard about the smokejumpers. And of course being out as a ground pounder that's not very glamorous and a lot better than what I was doing. So for the next two summers, 1948 and '49, I was with the smokejumpers in Cave Junction, Oregon, and the foreman was Cliff Marshall. Uh, then do you want me to go on and then come back or what on the biographical?

KT Sure

RW Go on?

KT Yeah

RW Right up to now?

KT Umhmmm, just so we have a general idea.

RW Oh, all right, okay.

RW Then, I graduated in 1951 from the University of Denver, went into the Air Force for four years, trained in basic training down in Texas and then went to Syracuse University for a year of Russian language training. Then went overseas to Europe, spent the rest of my tour in Europe, took my discharge in London and spent a year over in Europe after getting out, married a Danish girl. And we lived in Innsbruck for a few months over the winter.
time, did a lot of skiing, went to University of Innsbruck and things like that. Uh, then my wife went back to Copenhagen I went back to England and three of my friends and I outfitted a 42 foot sailboat and sailed it across the Atlantic to Miami, Florida. Then I went up to Chicago and then my wife came over on the French Line and I drove to New York to get her. Uh, then we went out to San Francisco, lived in San Francisco for seven years I was in the insurance business out there and I went...I entered law school, University of San Francisco, went through law school, passed the BAR, and then in 1964 got a job as a staff attorney for the State of California where I still am, as acting chief counsel now for the State Department of Education, legal office, so that brings us up to date.

KT Okay, now when you got this job... the blister rust job, in Idaho, how did you find out about that?

RW That I can't remember. I really can't remember how I found out about that, somebody must have mentioned it and then I followed up or something like that. Uh, but in those days we wanted to get out of Chicago in the summer time and do something different, you know have a little adventure.

KT Uh-uh

RW And so I, you know, I seized on that... the three of us did and I can't remember where I found out about it.

KT So did you have any problems getting accepted with the smokejumpers?

RW No, no I didn't... one year with the blister rust campaign and, and several fires I guess is what did it. Uhm and I didn't, I didn't know exactly what the standards were except being physically fit so, you know... reasonably, physically fit and some experience and that was it, so out I went.

KT What did your training entail as a smokejumper?

RW Well, the first year we weren't even out at the airstrip we were at... we were in tents at the Ranger Station in Cave Junction. And we would truck out to the airstrip where we... now wait a minute... did we? No. We had our training equipment down there by the Ranger Station. That's right. Oh, you know, the usual jogging along the trails, and calisthenics, and these obstacle type courses, you know. Letdown training from harnesses and jumping off platforms to get the proper roll... on landing with a parachute. And then the shock tower... not a shock tower like you have around here, where you get a ride also. It was a shock tower straight down and it jerks you, and that's it... and you go back up again. And it was about two weeks, as I remember, two weeks of training. And then we had, as I remember, five training jumps, and then we were ready to go. That's what it was. The next year, for refresher, it was calisthenics and all that kind of thing, you know. And then three refresher jumps on
the next summer for the returnees. That was the training. Yeah, it was... it wasn't hard at all, I didn't think. What really kept us in shape was work details between fires... and especially the second year, 1949, because that's when we built the base at the airstrip in Cave Junction, outside of Cave Junction. Barracks and mess hall and wash house and access roads and things like that... that kept us busy, especially the road... spent all day tossing rocks in order to make that road you know, blasting stumps and things like that and we didn't have bulldozers out there for us or anything like that, it was all... primarily hand work. And uh, other work details were mending fences and falling snags... we would go out in the woods and knock down snags before they fell down and that was uh, a little logging practice and we made fun out of that too. We'd go up the hill and try to domino some snags down the hill by undercutting about four of them staggered up the hill and uh, putting the cut on the other side and then dropping the top one and try and hit the next one down make that one hit the third one down and what not like that. So we made some fun out of it.

But the most... most fun I had on work detail was uh... trail clearing. Go up in the mountains and clear trail all day and then stay the night in a fire tower. And then clear some more trail or something like that and uh... then come down the hill and I remember once we came down the hill or I came down the hill just by myself on the cow catcher of a logging train uh... that was kind of unique. It was a funny old logging train, the engine was right out the wild west, with a great big smokestack and huge wheels and it looked like something that started on the transcontinental railway you know in 1800's. Anyway I was sitting on that cow catcher down... uh... I don't think anybody would dare let anybody do that nowadays because of the insurance rules, but in those days it was pretty loose, we did a lot of things that insurance companies wouldn't allow today. Like for instance, out here getting on board your jumper plane... you really weren't supposed to do that, but... anyway, those are the kind of work details we had.

KT Did you ever have any encounters with wild animals?

RW No, none at all... uh... I had encounters with wild animals in '47 up in Idaho, mountain lions. There were quite a few around there and we saw quite a few and a couple of bears and quite a few beaver too, because in blister rust why, you know, we string lines and we just go... go straight across the country pulling out this uh... weed that uh... infects pine. And every once in a while we'd come upon a pond or a stream with a beaver dam and uh... things like that. Real wild country up there... but not in Oregon, I didn't come across and wild animals in Oregon at all or in any of the jumps anywhere we went... no.

KT Well how did the smokejumpers feel about having to do project work?

RW At that time we all liked it. We liked it because we were uh... we liked to be physically fit and we were almost kind of
gung ho about it, you know, sometimes almost like Nazi youth [laughs]. There were a couple of gripes about it, but most of all it was uh... we did it with a lot of enthusiasm really. To keep in shape, we were mostly college types there... there were really... there were three categories of people in Cave Junction. There were the college guys who came out in the summer time and then there were another group who were just there for another type of employment you know for the summertime or as a vacation from their regular employment like a steel worker from Pittsburgh. This was his vacation really from steel working. That was the second group... yeah, but among the second group there were quite a few ex-paratroopers from World War II and well, I guess once you start jumping it's in your blood, so there they were... we had about... out of thirty guys we had about one, two, three... about seven paratroopers, ex-paratroopers newly out of the service.

KT Was there any rivalry between the different groups?

RW No, no there was no rivalry at all, no. So the age group ranged from eighteen to well... Cliff must have been in his thirties, I guess, but the rest of the crew we uh... the veterans were well into their middle twenties and late twenties. That was the age range.

KT Okay, your first training jump, can you give us an idea what the feeling inside the plane were before you made your first jump?

RW Oh yeah, well, I remember that. We were at breakfast... yeah, we were at breakfast and Cliff came in and says "Okay, this is it, first training jump" right in the middle of breakfast. So everybody made a big thing about that and manifested that by saying "Well, okay that's enough breakfast for me" you know, but they, you know might upchuck it and all that kind of thing, making a big thing about it. So we went out to the airstrip and suited up... oh admittedly we were all nervous about it, actually this was my first airplane ride too, I'd never been up in an airplane before. So, we went up and I think we took three at a time in that Noorduyn-Norseman, [a] Canadian built plane. We had a practice jump field right around... right next to the Illinois River, I don't know how many acres it was, maybe about 15 acres or something like that. Well, course, you know, we all had the butterflies in the stomach and I did too. How we went out that plane was to sit on the floor and put our feet out on a step, both feet out on a step, not like you do it here... one foot... and then what we were supposed to do when we were hit on the shoulder by the spotter was to kind of stand up on that step and step off, feet first. Well because it was my first plane ride I was very fascinated with the ground and I was looking down at the ground just to see what I could see and I got the slap on the shoulder and I went out that way with my face down, somersalting out of the airplane, saw the tail go above me. And when the chute opened it was a big shock because I wasn't in the right position see. Well, I hit the practice field okay, but I didn't land
right, I didn't land the way I was supposed to land and it was kind of hard, but that was all right, but the next few jumps were better and I went out the right way and things like that. I never did hang up in a tree, so I didn't have that experience, always came down between them and landed safely, so I was never hurt, never got even a sprain.

KT Do you think that the training prepared you when you actually had that first jump, that you'd been well enough prepared by the previous training?

RW You mean the jump training?

KT Him.

RW Oh well sure I was prepared, but I just didn't do it right on the first jump, you know I did practically everything wrong [laughs] from going out of the plane to landing. I steered the chute all right, that was okay I got into the field and fairly close to the streamer marker that we used on the field. What we did was have a contest of course like, I suppose, everywhere else, we put some money, oh maybe two or three dollars into a pot and the one who hits the marker gets the pot or if there... two of them hit a marker, three... they split the pot, you know. If we hit a fence you had to buy a case of beer, if we hang up you buy a case of beer, if we land in the Illinois River we have to buy liquor and then at the end of the season we have a big party down at the Illinois River with all that accumulated beer and liquor, it's quite a blast. So, anyway I hear up here that you actually have water jumps and we never did have one. We were supposed to stay out of the water. But here you have... you go into the water on a water jump to practice that. I suppose for up in Alaska where there are a lot of lakes, I don't know. But anyway, that's a... that was our jump environment, anyway.

KT How did the first training jump go with some of the other guys?

RW The first year one washed out... when it came to... I was in the plane too and this guy, [I] forgot his name, got into position and got the slap on the back and he didn't go, so the spotter... I forget who the spotter was, it may have been Cliff, yeah it was Cliff, yeah Cliff Marshall he was a foreman... so he gave him another chance... which was kind of strange I thought but uh, gave him another chance, came around again. This time he kind of slipped out, bounced on the step, grabbed hold of it and started hanging under the airplane... holding onto the step. Well, the ripcord could have pulled the chute out at that time and tangled around the tail assembly of the airplane... you know it was very dangerous. So, Cliff stomped on his arm and hand and pried him loose from the step and off he went and the chute opened all right and he landed in a tree and went back to the base, packed up and went home. Second year nobody washed out, we all went through it fine. We had some injuries. We had one of the classic injuries of a guy coming down between trees and
several trees picking up an edge of the chute dumping the air out and then he falls the rest of the way. We had very tall trees in Oregon. So he falls free the rest of the way without air in his chute and broke his leg and his back. Otherwise there were a variety of minor sprains, ankle sprains and things like that. The worst event that we had in terms of injuries was when a truck overturned. We were taking a truck full of guys into Grants Pass to register for the draft. And the driver... I don't remember how it happened, but he got onto a soft shoulder and the truck overturned. It was an open stake truck and it overturned and there were lots of broken bones and one guy had a brain injury and what not, so, it was kind of a disaster.

KT Was that in the middle of the season?

RW Yeah, it was right in the middle of the season. Luckily I wasn't on that truck. I had to register for the draft too... I was eighteen and so Dick Cole and I went in the day before in his car to do that. Otherwise I would have been on that truck too. So I missed that.

KT Fortunately.

RW Yeah, fortunately.

KT What was your first fire jump like?

RW Well, it was, as I recall, it was rather uneventful. Landed in clear ground and stayed about a couple of days or so, and then walked out... I think we walked out down to Gold Beach. We had to cross the Rogue River, the Rogue River was right in front of us and there was a row boat on the other side so I swam across and got it and brought it back so we ferried all of us over, went into Gold Beach and sat around and drank beer till the trucks came. Most of my fires were rather uneventful except for one little one. Bob Schneider, the steel worker, and I jumped a two man on a little one. Up in the Trinity Alps, somewhere in northern California. It was so thick in there that we couldn't find a clearing to wave our streamers to let the pilot know that we were all right, you'd have to wave these colored streamers. And there was just no opening either to put the streamers down or even to get to the top of a tree... those trees were so tall... we didn't have climbing spikes or anything. We didn't have our tools, we didn't know where the tools were... didn't see them drop at all. So there we were with nothing and no way of signaling... and our radio, we had a little walkie-talkie and that went out, that didn't work, couldn't raise the pilot at all. So the plane left and about an hour or so later came back and jumped another guy to see if we were all right, which we were. So as soon as he found out that we were all right and showed us where the tools were, he brought down some spikes and we got our tools out all right. Soon as that was finished why he hiked out... of course we had to carry his chute and tools out too. [laughs] So anyway, by that time, we didn't sit around and do nothing without tools... there was a lot of duff on the ground...
it was pretty thick and so we built a fire line with our hands and our boots. We just kind of kicked a fire line... just kicked the duff off and we got down to mineral earth in no time flat and got the fire under control without tools or anything like that. Then when Bob Nolan left... he's the guy who jumped in after us... we had the fire under control and then it started raining like hell, thunderstorm came up and it just drenched everything and us of course. And then we had to spend the night there so we had sleeping bags, and of course you don't climb into a sleeping bag with wet clothing. So we had to take all that off and the sleeping bags did well over night, but in the morning to get out of the warm dry sleeping bag and put on wet cold clothing is a kind of awful. So then later that next day the ground pounders came in and we hiked out. Other than that, you know, nothing ever spectacular on my fire jumps. In fact it was kind of... the two years were rather slow seasons anyway.

KT What were some of the other guys like that you worked with?

RW Well, there was a variety of guys. For instance, a couple of what you might call roustabouts, just wandered around... Bob Sweep was funny, he was that kind of guy who moved from job to job. Bill Green was his cousin there, he was one the squad leaders. There was some, well some of the college types that I related to and... well I related to everybody I guess... and there was one kind of wild guy there... Ken Westfall... 1948, he was an ex-paratrooper. He started this thing about young Geronimo when he went out of the plane, so everybody else would start yelling Geronimo too. He was an ex-paratrooper and he was quite a drinker too. I don't know whether you want to hear about drunk stories, but this guy was somewhere late at night and he was coming back to the base and he wanted a drink and stopped at a roadhouse and the roadhouse was closed and he was plastered by that time anyway, but he wanted some more and he broke into the place. Broke into this roadhouse, got into the kitchen, started throwing knives all over the place, kitchen knives all over the place. The owner found him and started chasing him and he took off, came back to camp and was looking for his Luger, he had a Luger. Well he made such a ruckus that several of us found his Luger before he got to it... he was so stone drunk anyway, I don't know how he got back. But we found his Luger and took it apart and he had all the parts. The next morning he took off and we never saw him again, the police were after him anyway so, he was gone... he was crazy. He tried to tell us that up in Alaska he was in some kind of an experimental paratroop project were they would fly very low and very slow and dump everybody out without chutes into the snow banks. [laughs] He was crazy. The other guys well, one of them was in law school, Dick Corson and he is now a district attorney up in Oregon. Two of them were in medical school, one of them got the brain injury from the truck accident and the other one's now a doctor up in Oregon... Bob Moffitt. Only four of us showed up here at this reunion from '48, '49 years from Cave Junction... Chuck Clemenson who I guess you already interviewed, Star Jenkins, Dell Jakewith... I haven't seen him yet, I don't know where he is, and myself.
KT Did you ever play practical jokes on each other?

RW Well yeah, I guess we did, but nothing that I really remember. Nothing elaborate you know. One thing that was a lot of fun there that we did. We bought a 1927... eight of us chipped in and bought for eighty dollars a 1927 Hudson touring car without the top. It was very hard to start. At the base we would have to push it with the truck to get it started and if we went into town we'd have to park on a hill or if we went up cross country to the swimming hole we'd have to park on a hill in order to get it started. And only Armand Resau had the touch to get that thing started. So he was always along, none of us would touch the thing to try and start it. But it was a lot of fun. It was a huge big car with wheels about four feet in diameter, you know one of those things. Fortunately we never had to change a tire because that was... that would have been a real job on that thing. We uh, well what else did we do...

KT What kind of things did you do on your time off?

RW Well on our time off we... what I did on my time off... we had to take our leave, Cliff made us take leave that we accumulated, you know all federal, government people accumulated leave. He made us take it so it wouldn't cost the Forest Service so much money in paying us off. So I would hitch-hike around the country, take a sleeping bag and just hitch-hike around... go up to the coast, down to California and back. Then one time well... Paul Block had a pilots license and we rented a plane... four of us rented a four place plane and flew up over Crater Lake and back. And then another time our spotter... or rather our pilot flew me up the Rogue River to a resort up the Rogue River, then I took a mail boat down to the coast then I hitch-hiked back, things like that. Other guys would do similar things they'd take off for places here and there.

KT What kind of planes did they use at that time?

RW Well we used a a jump plane, our main jump plane was a Noorduyn-Norseman... that's a Canadian built plane, single engine airplane takes three jumpers and all their gear and a spotter and a pilot. Then we had a little spotter plane, a little single-engine spotter plane... I forget L-1 or something like that... and then when we needed it a Trimotor, a Ford Trimotor would come in. I jumped out of that once... Ford Trimotor that was kind of fun, that was a lumbering big street car in the sky. And then we had a Bell helicopter, a two placed Bell helicopter, that would take us out sometimes when... on fires where we could find a clear spot where that helicopter would come in take us out one at a time... it was only a two place. So that was the extent of our aircraft out there.

KT What were the pilots like?

RW Ed Schultz was the only pilot... nice guy.
KT  How about the chutes?

RW  Well the chutes... we used F-1 chutes the first types with the two... I guess they were 4 or 5 foot slots. We didn't have any tails on them and we didn't have any netting around the perimeter like they have now. So with those chutes... they were 28 foot mains and we had 24 foot reserves. But the 28 foot main F-1s malfunctioned every once in a while. Several guys got Mae Wests, that was a line over the middle and it just creases down the middle you know, you have two bulges and you have to saw the thing off.

KT  Can you do that while you're falling?

RW  Yeah right, yeah you saw it off. One guy had a cigarette roll. That means that the chute comes out in a straight line doesn't billow out and fill with air... just stays in a straight line, it's like a cigarette. And so he had to pop his reserve and he came down okay. So, we had trouble with those chutes. Now I understand they're fool proof... these chutes now. One fire we didn't have to jump on at all, it was right across the road. A saw mill across the road and it blew up one day. Here you have the burners... the big conical burners, burn saw dust and what not and you have spark arrestors on the top and all that. Well it was defective and the thing just blew up and threw sparks all over the place, and immediately a fire started around there and got into... there were forest right around the saw mill, so it got in there right away. Sparks flew over across the road onto our airstrip... we had to move our airplanes out of the way... way out of the way. So we all piled into trucks and went over there and started hitting that fire. Well it was a big one and it crowned all the way into town and burned up quite a few houses and we had to evacuate a lot of people. So that was quite an event.

KT  And did they have?... How long did it take them to contain that?

RW  Oh, it took... I think we finally got it under control in less than a day, but it went fast, it really travelled fast and we were always falling back. Finally some roads, some actual roads got it under control.

KT  What kind of reactions did you get from your friends and family when you decided to become a smokejumper?

RW  Well, my parents didn't go for it, they thought I was crazy... why do you want to do that kind of thing for? But my uncle Herman thought it was great and so he supported me... well I would have gone anyway, you know, my parents weren't dead set against it and they weren't about to stop me at all like that, they just thought I was kind of nuts to do it. Actually they should have been used to it because the year before I was out fighting fires anyway and they got used to that part of it. That
was kind of a reaction. Friends, oh great, you know, that's a
great summer to do that kind of thing.

KT What kind of reputation did you smokejumpers have around
town?

RW First year there was some friction between the logging types
and the smokejumpers. Second year it was a lot better and from
then on I don't know what it was like. But there was some
friction and well some of the jumpers, I think were kind of
reckless. They'd go after girl friends of loggers you know, that
kind of thing that would set well around there. There were a
couple of fights here and there, nothing really terrible about
it. We weren't... we didn't have the best reputation around
there. [laughs]

KT Were you ever involved in any rescue jumps?

RW No, not me. Some of the others were. And not out of Cave
Junction, some time after, down in southern California two of
them went out on a rescue jump. That's what I heard about but
not during the two years I was there.

KT What were the crew bosses like that you worked with?

RW Fine, Bob Nolan was one squad leader and Bill Green was
another. Sometimes Dick Corson was a squad leader. They were
fine guys, good to work with.

KT Did they ever have any personality conflicts with any of the
guys on the crew?

RW Well, Cliff Marshall was kind of hard to work for. Several
of the guys got into disagreements with him on certain things, so
he was kind of touchy... he had a hell of a temper and it rose
pretty fast. But we got through okay... when he wasn't teed off
about something, he was a kind, generous, friendly type and the
squad leader was the same way, pretty good guys. Nothing
outstanding there, just plain good competent guys.

KT What were the general sentiments after the Mann Gulch fire?

RW Well that was in '49, July '49 and well... it was a total
shock and all that kind of thing that that kind of event would
happen, a lot of talk about it and things like that. I don't
know what it was like up here, but it was... well, just shocked
us that's all I can say about that.

KT Did it change anybody's perception about smoke jumping?

RW No uh ,uh. No, business as usual. Yeah, right. We never
got into that kind of a situation. One time one of the guys let
his chute burn up.... he didn't get it out of the way of the
fire, but that was all. Nobody ever got burned on a fire, nobody
ever landed in the fire perimeter... always landed on the outside
like we were supposed to do. No fire ever raced up the hill after us during those two years I was there, so we didn't have any of that kind of danger.

KT Can you give a general idea as to the basic fire procedures?

RW It was fire line making, that's essentially what it was all about. Jump into the area, get up to the head of the fire, make your fire line, fall trees if that was necessary, if they were too close and crowning you know. Drop us a cross-cut saw. We didn't have any chainsaws in those days. And then when we got it under control we'd just keep on working it until the ground crew came in and maybe sometimes that would take two days for them to get in, some places. Soon as they got in why we would take off and we would go out either by helicopter if the terrain permitted landings or we'd walk out or we'd take the horses that the ground crew brought in [laughs]... go out on horse back. We didn't have fire retardant planes, we didn't have helicopters with water buckets or anything like that, it was 100% ground work in those days.

KT So do you think it took longer to get the fires under control?

RW Oh, I'm sure it was. Yeah, except for the little ones... that was okay. I don't think anybody would waste a fire retardant plane on some of those tiny ones. Yeah, sure it took longer.

KT Is the crew boss that pretty much organized what everybody was gonna be doing or?

RW Yeah, hmm, sure. What we jump on are essentially very small fires. Anywhere from an acre to maybe 10, 15 acres or something like that. The most we ever jumped on any fire while I was there was about 10 jumpers that's about it. Up here I understand jumps 50 and 60 guys on some of these fires. But we never had fires that big that we worked. So it was very easy to organize the procedure once we were down there.

KT What was the food like?

RW Terrible, it was C rations and K rations. You know WW II army stuff, in those wax boxes. Also canned peaches, canned apricots and that kind of thing which of course we'd like to trade off. Get more canned peaches and get rid of K rations for anybody who would like those and I don't anybody did. There were nice chocolate bars in there but the rest of it was absolutely awful, awful stuff.

KT So what would you guys do in the evenings?

RW Well we ate it. Oh after we ate?
KT  No after you had a fire pretty much contained.

RW  Well, as long as it was light out, we'd work on it and mop up until the ground crew came in. We didn't work the fire at night... no night fires, they didn't have any lanterns or lights or anything like that, like they have now.

KT  Like would you guys bring cards and stuff like that?

RW  To the fires?

KT  Yeah.

RW  No, huh, uh, no huh, uh. We didn't.

KT  What do you think of the idea of the professional jumper like they have today?

RW  Well, I think it's a... an exciting kind of employment, sure. The thing is it's seasonal and that's one thing I wouldn't like is uh... right now at least at my age is to do this in the summertime and then try to find something else for the rest of the year, you know. I understand that... well, I understand that some or them are teachers, they go back to teaching you know the rest of the year and then they spend their summers out here. That's a good combination, that's fun. Other guys just take off and kind of bum around and then come back in the summertime.

KT  Do you think it makes a difference in the kind of guys that are on the crews?

RW  What do you mean?

KT  Uh, like their attitude, as opposed to the college student who is doing it just for the summer?

RW  No, there was none of that kind of friction. There was none of the attitude on part of non-college types to ridicule the college types or disrespect anybody. We all got along fine, you know, whatever we did. There was no friction at all between the two types. I don't know about now, but there wasn't at Cave Junction.

KT  Now that you've come back and took a tour up there?

RW  Oh yeah.

KT  Jumper base?

RW  Yeah.

KT  What are some of the differences that you noticed from what they have now as opposed to what you had to work with?

RW  Well the difference is... it's much more sophisticated now.
The equipment is much better, it's a... well the parachutes are infinitely better now because of the... design, it's guaranteed practically no malfunctions. The material for the jump suits is lighter and stronger. They have a lot better food... freeze dried food instead of the K rations and C rations that we had. But the basic tools are the same. No change, pulaski is a pulaski, a cross-cut saw is a cross-cut saw, spikes are spikes and all that kind of thing. Now they have night lights for night work, that's different. And the other types of fire fighting that's different... the fire retardant, slurry planes and helicopter water planes that's new... of course we didn't have that. But other than that... there's not much change, it's just better equipment now, I think. And better ways of delivering the cargo too, they don't use the nose bags that we did... and a lot of times they'd hand up, they have a lot better packing of cargo now, better delivery.

[END SIDE A]

[BEGIN SIDE B]

KT After you quit smokejumping did you ever think about it again?

RW Oh yeah, sure yeah. Well, the next summer I drove a lumber truck in Colorado. And uh, sure I thought about it... oh for many years, I still do. That's why I come to reunions. We had a reunion in 1978 at Cave Junction. And for my two years uh... seven of us showed up and we had about... oh over a hundred there all told from all the years.

KT Did you ever think that you wanted to try it again for a summer?

RW Yeah, but I knew I shouldn't. [laughs]

KT Why is that?

RW Well, you know, I good two years and nothing ever happened to me and I thought, well you know, all I have to do is take it up again and I'll break my head or something you know. And uh, I'm not... you know I'm over age clearly now to do that kind of thing. I couldn't keep up with anybody anymore.

KT Hmmm.

RW And there are other things to do. Two good years there and then you do something else. You have more adventure somewhere else you know... do other things. So, that's the way I like to live. I wouldn't have made a career out of this... even though it is adventurous and all that. I like different things. Of course I finally settled down too.

KT Well, from your experiences as a smokejumper do you think that... that affected your attitude or your career choices in the
future?

RW Smoke jumping?

KT Hmm.

RW Smokejumping to me was just two great summers of... between school sessions. That's all it was. I never thought of it as a career at all. Although sometimes I... have the feeling that I might like to have gone through forestry school. Sometimes when I get sick and tired of desk work you know... I feel gee whiz I'd rather be out in the woods with a career than in here.

KT Hmm.

RW But, that passes.

KT When you were smokejumping, did you have thoughts about forestry all?

RW No, none at all. No, it was only years later... when I was inside working. [laughs] And I wanted to be outside.

KT How about the work ethic, do you think that that incorporated itself in your life, the smokejumping career... work ethic?

RW I had work ethic before I went out there. Even in high school I had work ethic... for example in 1946, the summer of '46, I went to Michigan to work on a fruit farm for the summertime. Summers before that I would work in stores or you know... I'd have a job... I never just sat around in the summer time, I always had something to do as long as I was old enough to work. Or, another guy and I during high school had a car wash business and we made a lot of money on week ends washing cars... we had the whole neighborhood sewed up... washing and simonizing cars. And so, I always had the work ethic.

KT Do you think that was true of most of the smokejumpers that you worked with?

RW Yeah, most of them, sure.

KT Hmm.

RW Hmm, sure I'd say so.

KT Are there any smokejumper stories you'd like to share with us?

RW Aw, not really. It was uh... no I don't have any stories no really. Well, maybe Clemenson told you about this one, maybe he didn't. But we were up falling... cutting down snags one day. And diseased trees too, we were knocking those down. And uh, we
selected one tree and made the under cut, went around the other side and starting cutting through and putting the wedges and all that kind of thing and before we knew it that cross-cut saw was all the way through to the under cut and the tree was still standing. In other words that tree was cut all the way through... was still standing.

KT How big was this tree?

RW You mean how tall?

KT How big around?

RW Oh, how big around it was. Well maybe about... I guess about three feet in diameter that was about all. But there it was still standing. So, we had to put an under cut on the other side and topple it that way, but it was just perfectly balanced with the cut all the way through. That was kind of novel.

KT Uh, uh.

RW But otherwise, no I don't have any special stories. No hair raisers or anything like that.

KT Was there any time when... let's say after a fire when... before you walked out or as you were walking out or going out where you just had a real pleasant moment?

RW After a fire just before walking out?

KT Or as you were walking out?

RW Well, it was a sense of relief but at the same time we were carrying about 80, 90 pounds. And trying bash our way through Manzanita uh... that wasn't too pleasant, that didn't give me any pleasant moments. Once we were fording up a small river and I stepped in a hole, I went down to the bottom with all my gear on top. Somebody pulled me out.[laughs] But uh... yeah, sometimes it was very nice. It was very nice walking out. For example sometimes when we had... when we could load our gear onto a mule or something like that and just walk free and go over meadows and things like that... that was very nice, that was pleasant.

KT What was your favorite part about having been a smokejumper?

RW Oh, I guess just being up in the mountains, up in the woods, that was the best part. Just the whole environment was the best part of it. It was just great summers.

KT Well, do you have any other comments you would like to make about the smokejumper organization today or when you were jumping?

RW Well, I imagine it's going to continue for another 20, 30, 40 years until we get to the point where we can just say uh...
Scotty, beam me down. [laughs] And I say good luck to them. I hope some day that the Cave Junction Base will open up again so we can some more reunions there too. And I hope we have another here in about ten years. I think ten years is a good spacing of reunions. Otherwise it becomes old hat... any shorter than that... ten years is good. That's all.

KT Well I'd sure like to thank you for this interview.

RW Well, thanks for having me.

[END OF TAPE]