
CB My name is Craig Boesel and I started in 1966. I jumped through 1979, skipping 1975 and '76. I worked as an Assistant FMO [Fire Management Officer] on the Twisp District at that time.

KM You were saying how many fire jumps you had.

CB I ended up with 278 jumps, 139 fire jumps. On the research that I did for the NCSB Reunion there was five gentle men out of Idaho that had been retired or were retiring, there was one that was retiring that year, that had more fire jumps than Ashley Court at that time, had more that I did. Right behind me was [inaudible] out of Cave Junction. And they continued to jump so I am sure that they passed me. And Ashley Court went on so he had a 150 or 160 and at that time the people with the most fire jumps I think were around a 150 and 160. And they had all retired. That was the most that I could find recorded in history.

KM That is quite a bit of....

[interruption]

CB .... here and there and a story or two that I was talking about. It was really interesting.

KM What did you do, a history too?

CB Yes. I had to go back, of course NCSB [Northern Cascades Smokejumping Base] when they first started jumping they did some of those experimental jumps in '39 here and then... they went kind of back and forth, like some of the years in the early 1940's there weren't anybody trained here they were all trained in Montana and then came back out. So at that time I had to research some of those records that went back forth to Montana. But it was interesting, mostly. Really, you obtain your war stories and your experiences just literally out of the amount of time that you put in. Mine or anybody else's weren't any bigger or better than anybody else's, it's just you accumulate them, you had to just by the amount of times that you jumped out of the airplane. After you jump as many times as a lot of those other people that were on these tapes, or with a lot of jumps you just end up having a lot of good stories. It was always interesting to listen to somebody else's stories. Because everybody ended up with one or two just because they had done it.

KM So tell me about your rookie years. What made you want to jump?

CB What made me want to jump. Probably being raised in the proximity of the base I suppose. I grew up with that as something that I always wanted to do. At that time the qualifications to get into it were a little bit more liberal, in the sense that a lot more was left up to the base manager on who
he could hire and who he couldn't rather than how many years of fire experience you had. I didn't have that much fire experience. I had worked for the Forest Service for a couple of years during the summer while I was going to college. Finally got on in '66 in the summer.

We started the first... we trained for two weeks of course, and then fly into Missoula in the old Twin Beech for the first time. A two seated jump spot there that we were going to jump that Monday. That was the first time that I was in an airplane, was that Friday. So that was interesting to me, I can still remember that. I thought my gosh, it was an awful long ways down out of this thing. That was my first experience and that was, of course, the second time that I was in an airplane was Monday and it was the first day that we jumped. I remember too, one of the things that they told us rookies or any of us when we were rookies, at that base and of course they had been training for years and years. They would say this third jump is going to be the worst one because by that time you can think of more things that can go wrong. I don't remember any difference at all.

I thought I could remember everything that could go wrong on the first day that I jumped. I was scared enough the first time. I was probably nervous off and on really the first year as I recall. Then just like anybody else that has jumped the more that you jumped the better that you liked it. And the more that you did it, it was just like putting on your shoes in the morning. Actually looked forward to it. Whether we, some days when we were training, we got involved in training Canadians or something like that, jumping out of helicopters where we got repeated jumps in one day. Those are the days that I probably remember as fond as any because we got so many jumps. And of course that was the name of the game when you were jumping, that was one of the things that I enjoyed most.

Then I did get on, we started, we were supposed to have about fourteen or fifteen rookies that year. Through one thing or another, one person didn't show up, one quit the first day, one quit about the third day, so we eventually made it through the training and got twelve qualified from the ones that we intended to have. By the end of the summer there was eight of us left out of that twelve. One person [laughs] had gotten into different trouble. He had shot a hole through the door one time in the bunk house with a gun. So he wasn't on the best of... the situation with the people anyway. Then he left a fire, him and another rookie. So that person got fired. One person had, one of our rookies, there was a tree burned off at the butt and it fell down and fell on him. Then he was burned in the accident and permanently disabled. Anyway by hook or crook we kind of ended up with, actually we lost two the first summer. Then we had ten and then it ended up ... there were two others who actually died. They never did jump much longer. One died in Viet Nam and the other died in a tractor accident. So we ended up with eight, really that jumped for any length of time, of that twelve.

KM   How long did they jump?
CB Oh, gosh... other than myself of course, there were two brothers that jumped that same year, the McWhirter boys and... Bruce probably jumped as long as anybody of that age. I would have to check the records. I would guess that he jumped for four or five years probably. That was the longest of any of the eight.

KM So tell me about your first fire jump.

CB [laughs] Oh boy, my first fire jump. OK. The policy is definitely at this base down here and probably at most bases as far as I can recall, that you are staggered once you are qualified with an old, quote, an old jumper, and that was the same case down here. On the particular day of our first jump there was a job for the Twin Beech flying out of Bridge Timbers out of Wenatchee. So they said we will take a couple of jumpers down there. But you would sit there on the asphalt while the plane was being used and if you had a fire call they would come back and get you. They asked who wanted to go down. None of the older guys wanted to go down there and sit on the asphalt, it was always a hundred degrees it seemed like on that asphalt down on that runway. And so of course, who gets to go, send a couple of dumb rookies [laughter] So that's what happened. Another rookie and myself got to go and sit on the asphalt.

Well, low and behold, how would you have ever guessed it, we had a fire. And so they came back and brought back the old Twin Beech back and called us. So we ran and got suited up, old Dale Thornton and I. It was up the White River [laughs] on Lake Wenatchee, and Bill Moody was spotting and there was a... it wasn't too much longer after we had qualified so it fairly early in the year, one of the first fires of the summer actually. It was a high elevation jump in the sense that, I don't remember 8 or 9,000 feet where the fire was. There was snow, like snow patches down below the fire. So we circled around up there and it was just a little bitty lightning fire. It was really steep on both sides.

Anyway so they kicked us out and we landed there. Bill did a good job and what not, we landed right close to the fire. Fire was actually a normal fire so to speak, as years later taught me. That was a good two man fire we called it later. That was probably kind of the easy part of it. Then [laughs] the fun began. We decided that we were going to hike out of there and we thought we could see civilization in that direction. So we headed off into that direction. Probably that first fire jump the pack out, the two of us learned more about packing out than we learned in the next ten or fifteen years of jumps. We probably did about half of everything wrong that there could be done on a pack out.

First of all we walked down a stand of, standing on the side of the ridge. There was so much snow there at the beginning that we decided, well there is an opening in the trees and in the brush right down the side of this ridge because it was an old snow chute, in fact there was a snow slide in it. So we got our packs on and thought shit that would be the easy way to go. So we slid down the snow chute. As anybody who has packed out knows that is a real mistake. So we slid down that and it was great until we got to the end of it. Then we were at the bottom of a
very steep sided canyon. It was so steep and it was raining, pouring down rain. Then it decided to snow. And it was slick, we got down and it was so steep that we couldn't get up the sides again.

So we decided we would wade down the creek. So we started wading down the creek, and we waded and waded. Started coming to water falls, and the water falls got bigger and bigger. So finally we got to one that was so doggone big that we couldn't slide over it anymore. So we thought we were finally going to have to go up the sides. It was by maples and alders and brush, so we crawled up there and got up on the side of the hill. Got into that stuff and it was all of course slow flood there. The slope is going down at about a forty-five degree angle and we are trying to go side hill it. So it was foot by foot by foot. So we finally said this is ridiculous, we were hours and we had hardly gone anywhere. It wasn't that bad down in the creek but I don't know whether or not we would have gone back down in the creek.

So back down the hill we went and back into the creek. Same thing happened again, we went down a little ways and we hit another water fall. So back up the hill again, this time it was a little bit steeper so we had out pulaskis with us and like good rookies we brought every tin can and every piece of everything out of there. It felt like we had a hundred and fifty pounds, I am sure we didn't but it sure seemed like we did.

KM  Probably wet too.

CB  And wet, we had water running down the backs of our legs and everything was heavy. So we took our pulaskis out that time and we cut a path back up the side of the hill so we could get out of the creek bottom, because it was really getting steep now. So we cut it up so that we at least got above the creek edge and headed around the hill again. So by this time, we had started out at daylight in the morning and by this time it was getting late afternoon. We didn't have any radio communications or anything. There was an airplane flying over us and we had a suspicion that maybe it was looking for us. But we were in the jungle down there and they couldn't see us and we tried to wave to them. As it turned out later it was them but they were just checking on us because we were two rookies, kind of the blind leading the blind.

So they flew off so we decided we would keep going. Finally later that day, actually about eight that evening, we finally broke out of the jing-jangs and come out into just regular timber. We said well this way to the river and we will head to the river. So we come around the hill heading to the bottom. Sure enough here was the river. Well we got out our little trusty maps there. It was made in about 1948, that was the date on it I think. Which is not that uncommon to have an old date on maps like that. Old maps that have been sitting around. It said that there was a bridge down there and we figured out kind of where we were as best as we could. Well we thought that wasn't too bad. So we started walking down to what looked like an old road, down the side of what was the, is the White River.

Gosh there was some pretty good sized trees growing right in the middle of this road. How long ago is this map. And then we
started to look at how old the map was we hadn't until that time really looked at it. By this time it was getting pretty close to dark. So we went a little bit further and finally we dropped our packs so we could go a little faster. Sure enough we got down there and I would say that bridge had been washed out in 1948 when they had the floods in '48 up there. It was sitting in the bottom of the river. You could see part of the timbers, so we said oh my gosh.

As it turned out both Dale Thornton and myself don't know how to swim. So we thought how are we going to get across this river, it was a big river. Gosh, there were some holes in there, it was a big river, these holes were black. Being rookies you know we thought what can we come up with. Well we had our cross cut and we will fall a tree across this river. So we thought we'll hit that the first thing in the morning. So we went back up and by this time it was about nine in the evening. Getting pretty dark. So we hiked up to a little rock bar along the edge of the river there and it rained all night. We got a fire going and huddled around the fire til daylight come. And of course there were a lot of things that we should have had that we didn't have.

Daylight came and... we took the cross cut to a big old cedar tree growing right on the edge of the river. So we got the old cross cut out there, it was the standard cross cut, like they all are, same size. I swear it was one of the biggest cedar trees I have ever seen. That tree was just about two feet wider than the cross cut. My God we will be here for days trying to cut this and if we do fall it it might not go across the river, knowing how good we were with a cross cut. [laughter] We thought that maybe we should think about Plan B. So we said we will go back to our packs and think about this for a while. So we scratched the falling tree bit, went back to the packs and said we didn't have any idea of any bridge within miles and miles. We knew there was a road on the other side not too far. So it was obvious that we had to get across the river.

So that meant that somebody was going to have to go across the river. So we looked across there and find what we thought was the shallowest spot that we could find in that river. And of course the shallowest spot in the river would be the rapids. So we hiked down the river a ways and found the best, I guess if there is a best, rapids of that river in that vicinity. So our plan was that we would take one of us to go across first. We would use the two legs and the pole cut to use as a tripod to use for balance. We would tie a let down rope to the back of the first person's belt. The other person would stand on the edge of the river holding the let down rope. The person fording the river would then go across and when he was across he would tie the let down rope to a tree on the other side on the bank. Then his pack would be tied to a log which we had, would be the anchor point on the side of the river that we were already on. Then the second person across would carry across his pack using the let down rope as a guide. When we were both across we would pull the let down rope and pull the other pack across the river.[laughter]

So we had this figured all out, so we said OK who is going to be the one to ford across the river first. It ended up being decided on, Dale was really tall and we figured the river was
pretty deep so I conned him into it, Dale ended up being the one to go across the river. So he was about six foot eight, anyway he probably pushed the official height. So that is exactly what we decided we were going to do. We were going to go with that plan. So we tied the pack to a log there and tied the rope to him and we cut a pole for him and he started out across the river. I don't think either one of us quite realized just how deep the river was and how tough it was going to be.

But he started across, and jimminy Christmas it was a big river. We were quick in deciding that it was a bigger river than we ever thought of. He got out to about the middle of the river and by this time the water was between his waist and his chest, it was just white rapids. And so I thought, oh my gosh but by this time of course he was leaning so far forward on the pole that it was really hard for him to ever try and come back, he almost had to go forward. He was committed by this time. To show the width of the river he did not cross the river. Finally he got almost across the river, about three quarters of the way and he ran out of let down rope.

Definitely one, well probably more that one, thing that we had not planned on very well was that my pack was down at the camp and it had my let down rope in it. Dale had to stand in the middle of the river while I tied the end of the let down rope to a log and I ran back down the river for my pack at the camp site. Dumped everything out, got my let down rope and ran back while Dale was standing there in the middle of this river. I said hold on there but what else could he do. I tied the other let down rope on to his rope and so he went on across. And really the only close call that he had was that it was getting so deep I was having trouble, I had to pull so much tension that far, he was that far away from me, that I had to have so much tension on the rope to keep it out of the river that I almost had to pull back on it. And even with that, pulling so hard on him it did get down to the river once. And of course as soon as it got sucked down into that water it bowed way down there and he just came back up and the stick came up out of the water. I don't know who was helping us but I guess somebody probably thought we needed a lot of help and we did. And he teetered there and was screaming and hollering and finally it popped out and he fell forward on his stick. It should have killed him for sure but it didn't.

Any way so he stood out there and shook for a while, this is making a short story a lot longer, anyway he did get across the river. There was a steep bank and he went up and tied it to the trunk of this tree. Then he came down the bank and sat on the rope at the edge of the river so that it would be as tight as we could get it. So then the plan had kind of worked the rest of it, after we got Dale across. I went down and got my pack put it back together and put it on my back and then used the rope to get across. Carrying the pack across was not all that easy but I had the tope so that even if I fell down, which I did, and go under water I could hold on to that and pull back up. Of course the pack filled full of water which was a little bit heavy but I still had by far the easiest route than Dale had. So I struggle across there and crawled out of the water on the other side and took that pack off.
So then we went out and lugged on the rope and started wenching that log out there. We had tied the pack on the top of a log unintelligently thinking for some reason that pack was going to stay on the top of that log. Of course anybody who knows that as soon as it hits the water is going to go right on the bottom. Anyway it was OK, it only got wet. So we pulled in the log and we had it tied to a tree so all that we had to do was pull it across and we got the pack across [laughter] got it over there and boy those suckers were heavy. I couldn't hardly believe it, how much water that mylon could soak up. We couldn't hardly even get the packs up out of the river bottom to the edge of the bank. But any way we struggled and got them up out of there fortunately it wasn't very far to the road. And we went there and dropped our packs there.

We hiked down the road to Tall Timber Baptist Camp, I'll never forget that one, and we walked in there and [laughter] they were singing a song, it must have been on a Sunday. And we walked in stinking like you can be and looking like lost sheep which we definitely were. We had no idea of where we were. That was our first fire and I will never forget it. A real learning experience.

KM Sounds like quite an experience.

CB Yes, it was a dandy.

KM That was number one, what happened after that?

CB That was number one, oh my gosh. I don't even remember how many I got the first year, ten or twelve I suppose. The rest were kind of normal, average fires as I look back on them now. But that one really stuck out in my mind. We had five Mt. Baker jumps, they were always dandies. '68 was probably... one of those I can remember back, that was four of us jumped in the Olympic National Park. And for us out here that was... the tallest timber that we would ever jump in. Of course we would have the long jump ropes when you go there. Not very many people liked to jump in timber and I definitely wasn't one of them that did like it.

And we were jumping over there and there was four of us like I said before. We were the first two out, a fellow by the name of Vince Poulin, who later went and jumped in Alaska, and I. He was first out and he was twisted up so I jumped out and he was unfortunately was in the direction that we needed to be going. And so by the time he got untwisted the jump spot was a lost cause. 1968 was my third year but I was kind of a third year rookie probably. The spot wasn't that large anyway. It was kind of like the size of two car bodies or something down there, it looked like from the air. And the rest were just baby trees, and of course and anybody who has jumped at Olympic, what ever state you are in with big tree country, they had the old typical hemlocks that were so old that the tops were all dead in them. And them what ever, the reprod, they were whatever how many hundred feet tall. So at this point it was kind of don't hit one of the big ones if you are going to hit a tree.

7
You had hundred foot let down ropes then?

Two twenty, two forties, whatever we had then. I thought shoot, going to hit a tree, I'll try and take out one of these reprods. A reprod over there are monsterous, but so that was the thought. Of course we were jumping with 32's... FF 5 A's [chutes] that weren't the best compared to what they have now and what we got later, the T-10. But anyway, so I thought I would make one last turn right there at the last. I was coming in between two big trees and Vince had gone before I did, and capped right on the top of one of the big honkers. Right perfectly on the top, just put his canopy on the top. Of course if you are going to hang up like they would tell us when we were rookies, if you were going to hang up that was a good way to hang up, you wouldn't have to worry about falling out.

So I swung around there and I was looking at the trees that looked smaller and I swung a little bit too far. I snagged on to one of those big ugly ones, right on the side of the top. I swung it and it sucked me in and I hit the trunk of the tree, well it wasn't the trunk actually, I guess, call the top the trunk. I grabbed it and being a third year rookie I guess I vividly remembered something they once told us in out training. They said what ever you do, don't grab the trees. And the next several hundred feet I regretted ever letting go of the tree. I had grabbed it unfortunately long enough for my canopy to slip off the side and then when I made the decision after a fraction of a second to let go, it was kind of a race between me and the canopy of who was going to get to the bottom first.

And so... Skinny Beals, well he started out here then went down to Redmond for years, he had some real dandy stories to tell. He would tell of falling out of a tree and some of the things about how time goes slow. And I can relate to him on that one. I can still remember seeing the time past for lots of seconds for which I am sure was just fractions of seconds. I started out coming down through the limbs with my feet below me and then then next thing I knew one of my feet had hit a limb right in the crotch of my boot, I can still remember that just like I did it yesterday. And it buckled my knees up, pushed them up underneath of my chest. So then I started to tumble, I came back and I went over backwards actually, and then one hit me behind the neck and from then on it was just a tumble down through the limbs.

And I happened to think of Skinny Beals's story that we were talking about falling through the limbs. I remember him saying about what you were going to break and things like that. This may sound like a real made up war story but actually I am trying to keep as near to the facts as I can. But I remember thinking well, it is really going to hurt when I hit the ground. At this point in time I thought there was no choice, the green was going by me so fast that there was no stopping now until I hit the bottom. I thought well here we are so far from where ever we were and I thought, well I didn't want to break my legs. Because I figured that would be the real pits, I wouldn't be able to walk out of here.
So I thought, my big theory was I thought that if I kicked my feet up maybe I would just kind of hit on my back or something. My idea was that maybe I would just break my ribs or something. Well of course anybody who has ever fell out of a tree is usually, Tom Bowen could tell us, that if you probably kick up you will probably break your back and not your ribs. But my theory was at that time was that I was going to go for only the ribs. So as soon as I see the last green limb go by I am going to kick my feet up. That was really a good thought all right. So I am just waiting tumbling down through the limbs going it seemed like forever down the skyscraper of green.

All of the sudden the last green went by, I looked down and I can remember everything looked kind of red. Of course over there there is so much of the red rotten wood underneath and it was kind of red compared to the dirt colors or green grass or something over here on this side. So I thought, shoot, I was going to kick my feet. It happened so quickly that I didn't even wiggle my toes. All I can remember is that this green went by and I come down out of the trees and... this sounds like I made it up, it really do, but... the chute which is falling had gotten behind me by this time and was dragging through the limbs.

When I came down by the last limb when I gritted my teeth ready for all of my bones to come from togetherness, I come down and of course I was going forward a little bit, I hit my toes I swung back up in the air and I come back down I could, literally, if I stood on my tip toes I could stand on the ground. I looked back up and of course in the Olympic and places like that the reprod, the real reprod under the big, big trees... usually dies because of lack of sunlight. And that was what had happened in this spot. There was about three trees that had died at one time and they were about the size of telephone poles, and about the height of telephone poles. And they had died and the tops had broken off and this chute had hooked on two of them and it snagged right over the dead tops and I was hanging on those two dead trees.

So I just took my suit off and sat down there and shook for about fifteen minutes. Then I yelled down that I was OK, which I was, I was just as fine as could be. The irony to that is that I hit so directly straight down that it just worked perfect. When I went back to get my chute they were so rotten that I pushed over with my hand and got my chute. Whenever I think of... actually any time after that, if I heard of a fire in the Olympic I would cringe. I only jumped in there twice, that and one other time. The other time was tame compared to that one. Just up the ridge from the ridge we had jumped on was the world's largest spruce tree. In relation to how big the trees were that says something. They were... oh I don't know, they were ten, twelve feet in diameter at the butt in that area.

The interesting thing about that is they would drop the chain saw and everything we had, even the chain saw hung up in top of school marm hemlock. And so we had two rookies and of course obviously the rookies are supposed to be the ones that have to climb the trees. But we couldn't even make the rookies climb the tree. It was just, that school marm, climb up then it got to be so big that, and in those days we didn't have climbing
ropes or anything. All that we had was a piece of let down rope
and we would stick a piece of willow limb in to get some
rigidity. And try to work it up the tree, that just didn't work
with those trees.

So we had radio contact and we talked with the park people
and they said OK we will bring somebody in with a saw. Here is
the park people that work in that place all the time they hiked
in later that day, they came in and they brought us a chain saw
with an eighteen inch bar. Here we are with an eighteen inch bar
cutting down these trees. It happened to be that the one that the
chain saw was in was smaller, it was only about six or eight feet
at the butt. And we butchered it down [laughs]. We just kind of
went like a beaver all the way down, just kept cutting blocks
into it until we got to the heart and it fell down. Then the
parachute bellowed out when it came down and the chain saw hung
in another tree and we ended up having to climb up after it. But
anyway that was the 1968 Olympic jumping.

KM Your buddy got out of the tree with no problem?

CB Yes, he did. What we did on his was he came down fine in his
let down and there was a little bit of a slant on a hill, not
real steep. Just a fair angle up the hill I guess and we tied two
or three of our let down ropes together and then climbed up the
hill until we could get enough of an angle up the hill from the
top. Then all four of us, which I am sure was real good on the
canopy, probably handled real good after that. We got on there
and pulled until we snapped the top of the tree off. We got the
chute down and didn't have to climb up after it. Nobody wanted to
do that of course. That was the good old Olympic.

KM I have heard rumors about you getting shroud lines under
your chin.

CB Yes, I certainly did that one.

KM What year was that?

CB What year was that? Let's see, that was after I came back...
must have been around... I don't even remember for sure. Probably
around '77 or '78, somewhere in there. A fire that I jumped down
in Yakima, late in the year, not many people around. In fact I
think all of us that jumped on it were GS-7's or 9's. What ever
year it was it was in that time. Really windy, let's say, what
would we say in the smokejumpers? Marginal wind conditions. We
jumped and... boy oh boy was it blowing. Let's say it was
probably... was the type of day that was gusty so that not
everybody had the same wind conditions. So let's say when we
dropped the streamers, I think we dropped a couple of sets of
them, of you know maybe when I jumped and when the streamers were
dropped the wind conditions weren't the same in all due respects.

But when we jumped, there was two of us, a two man stick, we
didn't happen to land very close together. I was headed, there
was a fair opening there, the trees were fairly scattered too,
big ponderosa pine, few scattered fir. I was backing up there and
boy those old trees are whizing by, that was another one of those things that, I jumped enough by this time to think that this was going to smart. Any time you jump, you don't have to jump too many years, have banged your head a few times to know that when it is blowing that hard it is going to hurt. There was a road down there so I was trying to figure, well if I didn't hit the opening I would kind of line up on the road. Realizing that ... that the road is not the best thing to land on but versus landing in the trees, by this time I didn't like trees. When I quit I still didn't like trees. If there was anything that I could hit it, even a road I would probably do it, hit the road rather than hang in a tree. I did not like trees.

That was my big plan and of course as most plans go plans don't always work out that way. I hit a big old ponderosa, kind of in the side, near the top. I hung there for a second and at this point in time, all I knew was that I had hit the tree and one limb had hit me between the knees and one hit me right in the back of my hands, my hands were up on the risers. It had flipped me up and went I straightened back up I was looking down, I could see the ground coming and the chute was spiraling around, even though I wasn't turning, and it was turning. I thought that was odd at the time but I really was more interested in looking at the ground and whether I was going to land on the log which happened to be right at the base of the tree. I was kind of thinking of that and I was drifting off to my left. Then the next thing that I knew was that I was hung up.

As it turned out, I was real close to the road, real close. In fact what I had hung in was an old, old Doug Fir that was one of those trees that is growing up the road and is growing right on the cut bank and is leaning out over the road. Kind of about a forty-five and I was hung up in the top, well not at a forty-five but at an angle. Still at this point in time I didn't really put two and two together. I didn't understand the whole situation as of yet. As the tree was leaning out there was no real chance, easy chance, I figured of reaching the butt of the tree holding on to the tree. So after falling out of the pine tree and coming out of it, and then hanging in the Doug Fir had me spooked anyway and I thought boy I don't know how well I am hung in the Doug Fir. I was kind of leaning over towards the edge of the road, boy I really didn't want to land in the road. So I thought I will really do a nice let down, really mind my P's and Q's and really ease out of that harness.

So I was doing my let down and so on and so forth and... as I... there of course there is one point in time that, after you have thrown your rope down and you go to do your chin up under your arm and start to ease out of your harness. I was at that stage and all that I remember is that the next thing I know is this chute just jerks and we dropped and I don't know how far we dropped but we just dropped. And at that time then I fell forward out of my harness and lost my grip that I was doing my one handed chin up with. And I fell forward and I went toward to where my knot, where I had my hand on the rope, and the next thing I know I was hanging there and I had something around my neck.

By this time, gosh I don't know how many jumps I had, probably two hundred and some jumps. So I wasn't really that
concerned. I had confidence in myself, all of us do after we jump that long. But whatever it was it was all going to work out. I didn't know what was around my neck but I figured that I could get it off. I was working in the loft and in fact one of my main jobs had been working in the loft for years. And I jumped a brand new chute, I think it was only the second time it had been jumped. My first thought was I will get it off. At that point in time, hindsight, one of the things that I could have and should have done was just reach into my pocket and whip out my knife and cut whatever it was. But I didn't, I made the error in confidence that I could get it off without ruining the parachute. That I could just pull it off.

So I didn't and at that point in time then the more that I fiddled with it then actually, I could have tried to get my knife out of the back of my pants. But what I should have done at the beginning was, when I could still reach it, was to have taken the knife off the reserve while I could reach it because it was right there. But as time went on it became irreversible, I couldn't get that knife off the reserve and the way that I was hanging I couldn't get the knife out of the back of my pocket either. But as it turns out, to kind of fill in what will come at the end if I left it, there when I hit the first tree... approximately nine lines had been ripped off the side of the canopy. That was the reason for the spiral, that was the reason for the bad hang and evidently the shifting of the parachute as nearly as we can understand it I guess. That was also an error in my part that I didn't recognize that when I started my let down. That was another reason why there was so many lines dangling. Some of them had ripped, what they had did was they had ripped right at the sewing, right at the skirt at the parachute. Then there was one that was torn virtually apart, right in half.

Some how through that, to tell you the truth, none of the people that I know that were at the bottom of the tree, eventually later of myself, really did I don't think understand or see what was around my neck. I never did. But let's say it probably had something to with the situation that the chute was in. But, anyway I worked with that and I worked with it. At this time of course we were wearing a... we had a, of course later we had motorcycle helmets. But there at first we had old football helmets. And they had a notch in them like that, that kind of goes up and it makes almost like a hook if you are going to put something in there. And it had stuck in my helmet on both sides, whatever it was and I was hanging with my complete weight on whatever it was on my neck and I couldn't hardly reach anything other than to reach the lines to try to pull the weight off my neck.

And so that was my first thought. I would just lift up my arms and pull it off my neck. That didn't seem to difficult. But for some reason when I lifted up, whatever it was, however I was hung did not relieve the weight off my neck. It was still tight on my neck and I kept trying to fight and reach the thing off my neck. And I couldn't do it, I couldn't do it. Eventually, whatever time passed, whether it was seconds or minutes, it got so that I realized that I wasn't sure if I could get it off my neck. It was pinching my throat so that I would have to lift up
and pull up to get the weight off my throat so I could breathe. So then I would pull my weight up and I would breathe, take some air and then work as fast as I could on what was on my neck. The longer I did it the more nervous I got, the more nervous I got the more scared I got, used more air and oxygen and the more tireder I got. The more scared I got the more tired I got.

So quickly it was getting hard to lift myself back up with my own arm, and I was never any bulk person for muscle anyway. And finally I decided I am in a pack of trouble, real trouble. And at that point in time I would have cut anything. At that point in time I *would have cut whatever was hanging me and I would have dropped to the ground. I did not care. I wanted out of the tree. I could see that this could be a real serious situation. So I decided that the last time that I had lifted my arm, or my weight up with my arm I had the shakes so bad that it was, I was having trouble just lifting the weight off my neck to breathe. So I thought pride be with it, I needed some help and I needed some right now. So the fire was off in the distance, I could see the smoke but I couldn't see any people. I decided that the jumpers had gone to the fire.

KM All of them?

CB Yes. And so everybody was there. After all I had jumped for years and years and you know, everything's fine, sure everything is fine. Boesel should be OK and he surely should have been. So I thought I am going to lift, I am going to sit here and relax for a few seconds and then I am going to lift up and I am going to scream bloody murder for help. That is exactly what I did and I wanted to make no mistake about it. Because sometimes I had kidded around about somethings I had done and I didn't want them to think that Boesel is playing his jokes. I was not kidding. So when I lifted up that time and I screamed for help and that is just what I screamed. I made a blood curdling [laughs] scream that I wanted to be sure that if anybody heard it they knew they had better beat feet in my direction.

So the first guy that was running on into the fire was a helicopter [laughs] a guy that worked on a helitack crew. It happened to be a... black individual, was the one that heard me. And I talked to him later when we got back and he said, yup there was no doubt about it, he said when you let out the scream the hair stood up on the back of my neck. And that is exactly what I wanted to do [laughs]. He ran over there and two other people ran over there, actually several other people, Ashley Court, Bob Miller ran over. My plan which unfortunately had just about scared the helicopter guy to death was... I realized I could no longer fight with what was on my neck. I needed to save my strength and try and calm down. So I just sat there and tried to calm down and think of something, if nothing else relax and last as long as I could. And so I made this decision that as soon as I screamed, then that was it. I was not going to fight any more, I was just going to relax and hang on to my neck and then I would

END OF SIDE A
CB And so I had made this decision that as soon as I screamed, then that was it. I was not going to fight any more, I was just going to relax and hang on to my neck. And then I would only lift when I had to have air. Last as long as I could. Well when I did that he saw me screaming and kicking and then I completely relaxed and he thought I had died, and just literally scared him to death. Which I found out later. He thought I was dead when he got there, he was one of the first ones there. Then the other two like I said came. And so I could hear them chatting around there but I wasn't going to make any movements too much. I couldn't talk really and they of course weren't asking me any questions. Time was a little important there and as far as I was concerned if they had a chain saw they could of cut the tree down.

They were talking and figuring out what to do, of course part of the thing... I kind of skipped, it turns up later in the story. During this thing before I had yelled for help, one of my thoughts was I didn't care if the chute fell out, in fact I was trying to figure out how to get the chute to fall out of the tree. So I was jumping up and down and kicking around, and there was one limb that was within the proximity of my reach if I swung enough. I thought, before I had given up so to speak, I had given up that I couldn't get it off. And I had given up worrying about falling out of the tree. I had swung and kept swinging and kicking back and forth until I thought I could reach the limb. I realized that I didn't want to reach it on the end, I wanted to reach it near the base of the limb where it was big because I didn't want to break the limb off. That was the only limb I had a chance of reaching. Whatever, I had swung and I had reached to the base of the limb but unfortunately it was an old old doug fir and that limb broke right off, and it was a big one but it did break off. So at that point in time then, later what that has to do with it is there were no limbs for them to swing me to because I had broke that one off. And there was none that I could reach up or down if they did swing me.

Because that is what they had decided to do, they were going to take the end of my let down rope and then start swinging me. Which sounded like a good idea to me, I didn't have any better thoughts. I sure wasn't contributing to the discussion anyway. So the three or four of them that were there, so they took that rope and they were swinging me back and forth. And of course they didn't have to tell me I realized that as soon as I got near enough to the trunk of the tree, that I wanted to grab something, anything. So they swung me back and forth until I finally got to where I could grab the bark of the tree or something. So they kept swinging me and I couldn't ever grab, finally they got me so, like they said I made a latch with one of my legs on the back side of that tree and hung on with my feet for dear life. At that point in time when I was hanging on with my feet, or actually one foot was kind of hooked around the back of the tree, I got enough slack that whatever I got around my neck I just pulled off and it fell off backwards. They couldn't see from the ground and I never could see it anyway. I was looking up into the stars and I really didn't care what it was at that time.
I didn't even grab the rope, you know, as you are supposed to if you have the rope coming up through your hand to slow you up. I could have cared less, all I wanted was to get out of the tree. I just went thunk to the ground, and that was fine with me. That was really interesting, that was the end of the story. I still remember how weak my arms were. Of course we had our ditty bags then, those years we had ditty bags, which we didn't at the beginning. And I went to lift my ditty bag and my arms were so tired that I couldn't even lift my ditty bag, so I said I'll tell you what, I will carry my hard hat and somebody else can carry my ditty bag. So that is all that I carried, then they decided I wasn't much help on the fire. It wasn't until I went back to get the chute out of the tree that at that time Bob Miller and I, we went back to get the chute, we looked up in the air and seen the broken lines hanging down out of the tree. It wasn't until that time when I went to retrieve my chute that I really understood what was going on. And so that was that story.

KM That is quite a story. So what happened to you between '68 and '78.

CB Oh, God.

KM You were gone for two years.

CB I was gone in '75 and '76. I worked as Assistant FMO down at Twisp, in fuels basically. I quit for personal reasons to do that. Then I returned for personal reasons. I decided that I didn't really, I had good people that I worked with on the district, I just couldn't have asked for a better boss or people to work with. That wasn't the particular job that I wanted at that time. I enjoyed jumping and a lot of the people that I jumped with I was very fond of and I enjoyed that life. So then I returned and jumped through the '79 season, I finally resigned in 1980. At that time of course the studies were and still are going at NCSB on whether it was going to stay or not stay, get smaller, get larger, or whatever. Of course it got a lot smaller. They were telling us that the, so to speak we were kind of in a dead end street there. That the... not planning on having anymore year round work for us. So to speak, with out telling us, your check might be arriving at Redmond, Oregon. So you might consider that, so at that point in time, Baynard Buzzard who was working there and Ashley Court and I, Steve Reno, and of course Doug Houston who is now in Redmond... made choices and went in different directions I guess. Steve is really the only one left down there, of course except the base manager Bill who is still there. Steve, of course Doug went to Redmond and is still in Redmond. But Steve was kind of the only one there who hung on there and stayed on, as far as the ones that were there when I was there.

KM Do you recall any more stories between, or after '68?

CB Oh, gosh. Probably those are the, there are lots of stories but those are probably the main ones that I can remember that...
there was jumps that, oh God, the only other one that I, it's not
that unusual I think, after jumping a few years. I have seen
fairly similar situations. We jumped one time over in the Baker
country, Mt. Baker. And it was one of those things, it was late
in the year for me. I was going to college, so it wasn't that
late, late for the summer. It was in September. Lots of rain, so
we had trouble. We were flying in those... in that particular
time of the year we flew in an Air Commander. Took three of us.
Noisy plane, cold plane, if you sit right there in the door.
Anyway, so we took off, Terry McCabe was spotting us. The
fire was started by a hunter and it was high up in the alpine
country, the lake was one of those glacier lakes. Sat up at the
base of the glacier, as usually they are they are in they rock
slides. Then there was a little plateau and it dropped off and
the lake drained down the side of the hill. So there really
wasn't too much of a jump spot, there was just kind of the end of
the lake. On that little camp spot then it just kind of went down
the hill. That was going to be the jump spot, really it was the
only jump spot to choose from. And the wind conditions were such
that we had to be dropped out over the lake. Also as it turned
out that the direction that we were given, by what the streamers
told us, was of course this big mountain... that rose right out
of the edge of the lake there, snow'capped mountain, and it was
that we were to fact the top of that mountain until we seen the
ridge top go out of our sight of vision. At that point in time we
were supposed to turn and run back into the lake.

That was good and Terry was a good spotter, I had complete
confidence in him, really a good spotter. I had good luck with
Terry and he had good luck with me. I think I did, or I tried to
do what he told me, and so I watched the hill and I turned around
to go, and boy, by the time I turned around, either I turned
around a little late or whatever, I could quickly see that this
was going to be a long run. Anyway, this is making a short story
long. That was before, this was in the beginning of my career
before we had the practice of jumping in the swimming pools and
landing in the lakes and showing us if the suits floated or
anything. That discussion wasn't even in in the beginning of the
sixties. All I ever thought about was that if you landed in the
water not knowing how to swim you would probably sink. Since it
was the *bottom of the glacier and there was ice on the water I
didn't figure it was going to be real warm. So I think I might
have hit the edge of the water. Anyway I planed, and jerked and
walked and anything else that I could do and I landed right with
my heels in the edge of the lake. It turned out great.

KM  Was the chute in the water?

CB  Yes. So that was kind of exciting. But you know those
things, I jumped with guys who have landed at the edge of a river
and their chute went down the river and things like that. That is
not uncommon, just as well as those others are, you know, that
hung in trees and fell out of trees. Over the years. Mine aren't
any different than anybody elses. They just *happened to happen to
me. There are a lot of other guys that you might interview that
had the darndest stories too.
How about rescue jumps?

Oh, gosh. Rescue jumps. Probably the, of course after I got my permanent appointment and I graduated from college and decided that I didn't want to really do what I had graduated in. I graduated from Washington State and chose not to follow up physical therapy or whatever it was I was in. Then I got more involved probably in the rescue jumps because a lot of the rescue jumps came early in the year or late in the year when other people where not there. Probably one of the first ones that comes to mind was a late jump, a late jump. Out of the old Twin Beech, flying with Dave Russell, which did a lot of good flying for us. It was an accident that had happened to a Forest Service employee that... was at the end of the, well he was in the Satan Wilderness area up by Hidden Lakes, is what they called it. We jumped on a hill side up there.

What had happened he had found a bunch of old caps, dynamite caps and he was afraid someone would find them and hurt themselves. He was going to take them, he was a blaster himself, he was going to destroy them. When he was carrying them they went off. It eliminated his arm just below the elbow, I guess it was just above the wrist. Blew it off completely. I guess the experience of that and sitting with him during the night giving him, Bill Moody was there, he was the one administering it. But listening to him getting Demerol and whatnot was one of the rescues that I remember the most. Fortunately we were right close, we cut a helispot out and the helicopter came so we really didn't have to transport him very far because probably on the rescue jumps some of the transporting the accident victims were some of the hardest parts that I can remember, was getting them out on stretchers or whatever.

Well, Demerol, the wonders of Demerol.

Yes, the wonders of Demerol. It really did, you know just give him a shot and he was, like shoot I can't remember what I was taught now. But whatever we were supposed to aim for, an hour and a half before he got another shot, or whatever that was, he would last about forty five minutes before he had to have another one. You give him a shot and wait a few minutes and... it did the job. Even though his arm was gone, you could see the parts hanging there, what was left of his arm. He could endure, so to speak. Amazing stuff.

Let's see here, how about malfunctions?

Not very many.

You or anybody else around you?

I was really not around that many malfunctions at all. We had the Mae West's. I jumped with people, I never had any Mae West's. I jumped with people that had the Mae West's and stuff like that. Line overs, lines under, you know between your crotch, and things like that. But not any really serious things. I had a
reserve pop one time in the airplane, but someone stopped it before it went out the door.

KM Really, that could have been...

CB Things like that that really, you know that I can remember and I had seen other people pop a reserve. I happened to [laughs] be there I guess, well when I spotted those last several years I can remember hooking them on the old, of course that is back before we had the boxes, when we had the old fire packs and shovel handles, pulaski handles sticking out as kind of a hazard. Sometimes I'd hook the reserve handle on the top of a shovel as it was coming out and it would pull a reserve every once in a while and it would snake out the door of a Twin Beech.

Probably, oh gosh, malfunctions I think probably more of the malfunctions than parachutes I remember, as far as the malfunctions in the airplanes that we had. Of course we flew a lot of DC-3's, they were Dougs and I really had confidence in the pilots that we had, I thought we had really good pilots. Ken [Inaudible] flew for a lot of the years that I was there, Bill Russell did, both I thought did good jobs. If they said we could do it I believe we could, and we did. They really, I think, did as much for smokejumping our pilots, as anything that we could do. We couldn't do anything if we didn't have the gear on the ground, we couldn't do anything if they couldn't get us up.

And some of the planes that we had, more than once we had to bail out because we only had one engine. That was, you know, I don't know how many times that was in the short career that I had there that we had to do that. That was not that uncommon to have to jump out of the Doug for malfunctions of the engines, or thinking there was a malfunction, or a leak or something like this. Probably the Beech 99 incident, that I can remember... I won't mention any names because that is probably kind of a touchy subject, in case someone is listening to this. But let's say we were out doing... it was a fire bust. Over in the Colville country, I was spotting, it was a fairly new pilot... far as Forest Service dropping, at least definitely new to our base. The standard procedure that I was used to working under was the pilot was really... his responsibility was the airplane. My responsibility was getting the people in the fire, and the safety of the jumpers and what not. I really relied on whatever those pilots told me. And one of the policies and procedures of Forest Service standards are that the guideline is that you always land with thirty minutes of fuel left in the airplane. That is as I understood in those days, that that was the pilot's responsibility. I was never worried about it, I never paid any attention to it. Well we were dropping these guys in Colville, this guy said well you know we got time for another pass or two but then we had better start headed out. I said OK, so we dropped the cargo and I hopped back in and he said which way is west? I said this way is home, and he said well how far is it? I got out the map and I showed him where we was, and he said well we don't have that much fuel. He says where is the nearest one, I said well we looked at the map and it was probably Deer Park by Spokane.
So we started a long slow glide, and it was up to us, or I guess somebody had to decide, it was either you stayed high so if you had a problem you could jump out. And then the jumpers, which we had some left in the airplane... could bail out. Or you could coast, more or less and try and save as much fuel as you could. But from his direction... it was going to be close, real close. So it was our decision, right or wrong, to head and we wouldn't keep altitude, we would glide as much as we could and we would lose elevation if necessary. And kind of follow the open country, fields or whatever we had to and head for Deer Park.

KM  At an elevation that you could have jumped out of?

CB  We could not jump out. It was going to be bail out of the airplane if it went. Well before we reached the airport, the first engine ran out of fuel. Of course they were fueled simultaneously at the same level so that meant that we did not have a large amount of fuel left in the other one. Then it turns all out, we landed in Deer Park, made it. I can't remember but I believe we had two pounds of fuel left in the engine that we landed on. I can't remember, I remember one of the other pilots computed how much fuel the Beech 99 uses in so many minutes and it was not that many seconds that we had.

But that was probably the, some of the malfunctions in the airplanes probably I think of as much as the malfunction with the parachutes. The parachutes are fairly really competent in them, like most all of us, yourself included... I just believed the parachute was always going to work for me. Sure you might have a Mae West or inversions. I had partners who jumped with me that had inversions. Lester Domingos one time out of Redmond, he jumped with us. We were jumping a fire in Redmond, old Patrick McCauley was spotting us. He had an inversion, I was first, he was second and he was above me. He didn't realize that he had an inversion, I didn't realize that he had an inversion. He was right square on top of my canopy, so I kept saying I'm going to turn left and so he would turn left and of course he would turn right because he had an inversion. And we went like that all the way, he was walking on the top of my canopy and I am thinking Oh my gosh, he is going to come through my canopy. I landed and he landed on top of my parachute. I never did know that he had an inversion until we got down to the ground. He never did either. But there was a few of those, most everybody has something like that.

KM  Until now, now there are no inversions.

CB  Yes that's right. Of course we don't even have the old 5-A's. When I started I jumped the Twin Ace a lot because I was light and the lighter guys jumped with the Twin Ace. And then you can go back to the, you know the guys to me that would really have the stories are the people who jumped, they tell the old stories of the canvas suits and the Eagle chutes. Those are the guys that have the stories. When they had a hundred fire jumps, they had some real tough fires. when I jumped it was a lot easier compared to what they had. They had some real good ones.
KM How about pack out?

CB Pack outs. Oh gosh, pack outs probably the first thing I think of pack outs is...

KM Your first one.

CB Yes the first one. That is true, probably [laughs] that's probably true. I hopefully learned a lot from the first one, I sure should have. Mt. Baker probably gave us some of the worst pack outs that I was on. I think. When we first started jumping, or when I first started jumping, we had the old McCullogh 797's which were just really hogs for weight to carry out. Then later we went to the littler CB 7 E's and of course the Pro 80's and stuff like that. Depending on what base you are at what kind of saw you had. In those days they had some real lumber jack saws you had to carry out. That was a lot of the weight that you had to carry. Probably Mt. Baker, the steepness of the terrain, and places where we had to rappell down with ropes and stuff like that, so steep and so rocky.

I can think of, there's a ... there's so many other stories that I have heard that outdo most of anything that I can think of. Stories like at Redmond I remember a fellow jumped a, a heck of a strong fellow, a guy by the name of Ed Wisenback who was later killed in Viet Nam going for his second Purple Heart I guess. He was one of those fellows that feared not, who can't do it, well let me in and I'll do it, he was one of those guys. And he would tell stories, or they would tell stories of old Ed that... I happened to be in plane when they jumped on a fire down there and Ed jumped on it and it was burning, literally was a... burning... it was one of those up shoots of volcanic whatever. It had trees on the top and there was cliffs all the way down. Big cliffs, no way you could get off of it. You would have to get a helicopter ride off it. And on one of those little ledges there was a bunch of trees growing on it and that is where the fire was. They tell the story of letting Ed down there with a let down rope tied to him, swinging down over the cliff with a chainsaw cutting on that fire. There was people doing things like that that I think are probably more important than anything I ever did.

KM What was your longest pack out?

CB Oh gosh, my longest pack out. That is a good question. I would say just over twenty miles I suppose. Those usually, fortunately weren't too often. Usually the Satan Wilderness Area were probably the longest pack outs that I got. The rule is and was that we don't have helicopters in wilderness areas unless there was a real large fire, you usually walked out of there. Satan is pretty good sized, compared to most of them, it's a big one. I am trying to think, probably the busiest, 1970 probably if I was going to say if anything was memorable to me during my career was the summer of 1970. It was kind of one of those, I can't say it was enjoyable. Let's say it was memorable in the sense that from a smokejumpers point of view and the NCSB, you
couldn't have had much of a busier year. It was just literally the country burned up.

I can remember I happened to be in the first plane load that went out when the first bust came through in 1970. And we flew down to Yakima. At any rate, we jumped a Doug load of us down there. That night, that was only the beginning, a storm came out of the south and we jumped there. They came and pulled us off the fire about midnight or so and then drove us to the Yakima airport. We drove virtually it seemed like all night and we got there early in the morning, just before daylight. Then they flew in the plane and they brought the parachutes in with them which is not that unusual to all of us. We had been picked up in airports and given chutes and jumped somewhere else again. Just like jumping Alaska, we had been to Alaska. In Alaska it is not that uncommon to go to where ever and be there for a while. Anyway they brought us fresh chutes and at that point in time we hadn't realized what [laughs] the real size of the storm was. So they took us up and we started to fly down, they directed the spotter to just start down this ridge. That summer was the summer that I have never seen I guess before or after.

There were so many fires on that ridge, just that one ridge alone, that there were just literally hundreds and hundred of fires that had been started in one night. It was... maybe a smokejumpers dream or a smokejumpers nightmare, I don't know what you would call it. They would just literally have semi's parked in the compound with food, airplanes from every place that you could get them. A hundred and some people on the jump list. In one summer, at that time, I don't know, I don't think they have changed much since 1979 or '80. That summer I jumped as late as anybody so I was fortunate or unfortunate. We had a race for how many fires we could get. Not counting years that I was in the program where we went back east and we jumped in the spring in Tennessee and Kentucky and all those places, then there was people you knew in the early years out of Missoula and out of here that used to jump Silver City early in the year and stuff. And of course going to Alaska and places that you could acquire quite a few fires. But the most fire as far as I know that was ever jumped out of NCSB in one summer without going some place else was in 1970 and I got 21 fires that summer. To do that I got the last fire of the summer.

But that was just, you know, you would get so tired. I can remember looking for jumpers and they would say we need another Doug load, they would go 4 more Doug loads or whatever, and you would go in the bunk house and say is there anybody here and they would say nope. Nobody wanted to go, they were tired. They had jumped and jumped and rejumped. There was just hardly, they had to scrape people up. But it lasted that way, really they had two or three major storms that went through that year. I can't even remember the statistics that NCSB dropped that one summer. But it was phenomenal, phenomenal summer. That probably, and that in itself that one summer had I suppose a lot of war stories from Bunker Hill fire that jumped twice. They jumped it and it reflared up and they rejumped it again. There was like in that one Bunker Hill, tree fell on a fellow and they carried him out. The amount of jumps that were made, the amount of people that
were hurt, the equipment that was used. They bought like Min-Mac 6's just strictly for that fire alone. They bought I think it was forty of them all at one time just for that one fire. It was an unusual summer. That was I guess a memorable part of my career and probably most anybody that jumped in 1970. It was never any other summers that I know of in the Northwest to match that summer as far as jumping goes.

KM What are your reflections on the whole thing?

CB Reflections on my career?

KM Yes.

CB Gosh, probably... as I look back on it, I surely glad that I did it. I wanted to do it, and when I resigned...

KM In 1980?

CB Yes, 1980. I resigned for personal reasons, I guess... yah, for personal reasons. We will leave it at that in the sense that, you know, I still wish that I could go back and jump. It was a good time, tough times, but gosh, the time when I started when I was a kid... first started out of school. The pack outs started seeming longer and the packs seemed heavier and the mountains started seeming tougher and I was healthy. I felt good that I had jumped that long. And it seemed that when I first started jumping that the big goal in the '60's was to get a hundred jumps. And hardly anybody had a hundred jumps, in this country anyway. Then somebody finally did it, you know, a guy by the name of Larry McClellan was one of the first ones.

So that was something that I always wanted to do, I always wanted to be one of those people. And I really took pride in being a smokejumper. So that had a lot to do with the goals in my life at that time. So then pretty soon I was one of those that had a hundred jumps. So then I thought, gosh, nobody has made a hundred and fifty, I'll stay until I get a hundred and fifty. So then you know, gosh, I'll go for two hundred. So I went for two hundred. Then I got two hundred and then that is when I resigned the first time. I thought, well two hundred, that is a lot of jumps and I had an opportunity to open up a new job, to go down there. So I thought well, shoot, that is a good time. I had had some really good times and was right after the Russians, Bill Moody was... they went to Russia and learned about Russian smokejumping. The Russians had come here, the Russians were here when I jumped. And they gave me a medal of honor for being a... for being a... you know... having to get my two hundredth jump when they were here and everything. So gosh, it was kind of a good time to quit, I thought. Well then I quit, then I came back. And I said well, shoot, I'll do it some more. I was still, that young. So I thought I'll come back and do it some more. So I came back and I said I'll head for two fifty. So sure enough I got two fifty. And I thought there weren't too many who had three hundred. I thought well I'll go for that.
There were people that had three hundred jumps, there are people who have six hundred jumps. I am biased on the subject probably because I feel that there are these people like Ashley Court and Steve Reno and those that got only, maybe only three hundred jumps. And maybe there is Timbucktu that lives in Tallahassee that has seven hundred jumps, but that had been seven hundred jumps IE jumps, PR jumps and so it meant to me a lot to see how many fire jumps I could get. It meant something to me about those Ashley Court's and Wayne Webb's who had done a lot, a lot of tough ones. I took pride in it. So my aim was going to be a hundred and fifty fires and then I was going to call it quits.

So I got to a hundred and thirty nine that year and the end of the year rolls around. Gosh, I thought, jimmee Christmas, a hundred and thirty nine. I'll never make hundred and fifty in another year. So that meant that I was going to have to jump another two more years, to do a hundred and fifty. So I thought, gosh, well if I get a... I have to go more years, probably, then I would have to go, then I thought what if I go three more years. Then I thought well if I go three more what's going to stop me. Someday I am going to have to quit. And I had some particular reasons at the time, as far as where I was going to go. I was fairly young and I was a 7 [GS-7] and it looked like I was going to be a 7 forever. I was going to run out of steps pretty quick, kids are getting older, and shoot they are all ready raised.

At the NCSB the policy is and was that you, as long as you work there you are one the jump rotation and that meant that you jumped like everybody else. There was no, you know, just because you are a GS-7 or a GS-9 you got to go off the jump list for the good ones or the bad ones come, things like that. So that meant that I was going to have to be like I was when I was twenty one forever, if I was going to jump that long. And I wasn't going to be that way forever. I was the first one to admit that I wasn't as fast as when I started and I wasn't that fast when I started. So I thought well shoot, that has to be taken into consideration. Kids are getting a little bit older, they had started school, the oldest ones at that time. So gosh, you know I was gone all summer and I was trying to ranch and I decided some time ago that I couldn't jump forever and I liked to ranch.

So I was fuming at nights at three o'clock in the morning and what not. Doing all these kinds of things and then when we would have a late season in Cave Junction or someplace. We would go to Tennessee in March, gosh we would go to Alaska for a month and a half. Then I would get called back in here at the ranch, so to speak, the kids would be back in school you know, shoot. Then they are busy all the time and so a lot of things to do with my career and the future, I guess I decided that it was time for me to quit. But in retrospect, which is what was originally asked I am glad that I did it. I would go back and do it again. If I thought I could turn the clock back and probably be twenty three again I would go back and do it.

Things have changed, they are different in many ways, some things I don't personally think are not as good as they were. All depends on the area that you are in, the chutes are better the planes are newer and better. I liked to jump, I liked that a lot, I liked the "Joe Bloe" GS-6 smokejumper, you know, really, most
of them at that time in the '60's and stuff, you know, they were there to basically have a good time and make some money. And a there is a lot of good people, I see and I met there, and I remembered and that was that comradeship that I probably wouldn't have given up for anything. It was like when I played athletics, I was part of a team that I really enjoyed being part of and of course we're all connected to probably our own bases depending on how our philosophies and how our personalities are made up. And NCSB I had a, it was a small base, like I, it only had eight or ten rookies at a time and when we were jumping there, maybe we only had eighteen at the base and when we had the LeGrande base down there when we'd go down there and we had, heck, have eight guys or something down there, it was, you got really attached to a group.

You could convince yourself, well by golly, you know, we were the toughest, we were the best and Cave Junction would say that they were the best and they were the toughest, you know, and somebody took pride in that. And that part I enjoyed and I, you know, I miss, it was kind of some of those people like Ashley Court, Steve Reno, I was really proud of being part of that group and they were really special people and still are. And a, you know, like the boys now that we have, say, well, I want to be a smokejumper someday. I think I could tell them that there are some really good things and some things that you've got to take into consideration on as far as your future and real, realistic of what the job is. But boy, if they want to do it, that would be more power to them, ya know.

I, *every time* I every time I can hear probably a Twin Beech go by, if it's ten miles away, I can tell a ten Twin Beech. Anybody's that's ever jumped out of one can tell one and the sound of a Twin Beech, you know, and I still think, gosh, ya know, it would be kind of nice to jump a little two men in a meadow someplace, not too big of a pack out, you understand. [Laughter] Maybe a hunter fire, not too far from the road, things like that, so, you know, I'm glad I did it, sure. I'd do it again.

KM Oh, that's great. Do you have anything happen while you were back East, jumping?

CB Oh, back East, back East was, of course, a whole kind of different game in the sense that first of all, back East everyone has to understand and do it, and of course, do if they were there rather than knowledge of the thing is one thing. Out here most of our fires that we jump are lightning fires, back there 99% of them were man-caused fires, arson fires. Deciduous cover and windy, similar conditions with the few times I were, was there, it was exceedingly windy and a lot of wind back there, more consistently than it seemed like that we've had here. So you had a lot of windy jumps, and some real high winds.

And to tell you the truth, some of the stories that I've heard back East, one of the ones if you haven't talked to you should talk to, and it's a dandy, it happened back East. But it did not happen to me, but I heard about it and that is if you talk to Barry George, Barry George. He jumped back East, he has a
story there that he landed on a power line and over, there's a power line across the ravine, canyon and they tell the story, there he is just draped over these power lines and his chute, of course, is on one side of the power lines and he's on the other and it's blowin' like crazy and the power lines are tangled up. Of course, you're caught between a rock and a hard spot, there, ya know, your, the wind had come up and the chute would inflate and it would pull him up toward the lines, and of course, you don't want to touch too many lines, you'd be a fried cookie. At the same time you can't be hoping that the chute's gonna fall out, because it's gonna be a long time to the bottom of the canyon, ya know, so here he is and all these jumpers are standing at the base of these, these supports at the edge of the canyon, the draw over there, and to think, he could fill you in on all the details. But it probably has to be one of the classic ones I have heard that, it keeps blowing the chute up and then it will collapse, blowing it up and the angle of the line as it climbs higher on the one side of the ravine than the other. So as it's doing this inflation, deflate, inflate, deflate, it works him back toward the edge of the canyon and he works his way back to those, down the power lines, to the edge of the canyon and then drops off down where the power poles are at the edge of the canyon, and that's how he makes it.

KM  Oh, my God.

CB  And he doesn't get burned up, you know, he doesn't break his neck. Now he can fill you in with the details, but that's probably one of the better ones I've heard from the back East country, that was a dandy. But a, it was an interesting experience, we got to cover a lot of different states, Kentucky and Tennessee and the Carolinas and Georgia and they even got, I didn't jump all the years I was back there. But it was different, I guess I would say. And the time Mick Swift, there's another individual that will have some real stories, did a lot of different things, jumped out of Cave Junction for years and years. Anybody that he mixed with would have to say that he was definitely an individual, and I personally really thought a lot of the man. He ran the outfit that one summer, the whole one spring that I was there that full spring and he jumped out of, he was out of Cave Junction for a long time.

Alaska? Alaska probably had some good stories, anybody that went to Alaska. I went there for two, two summers, I can't even remember the length of time we went each time. One time was over a month we stayed there and one was just under a month, I believe. The first fire jump probably there in Alaska was the more memorable of the two. I guess I should I relate back was my first jump in an area I should be a little bit better prepared. But I think it was in '72 or something like that, we jumped up there, another fellow and I, his name was Mike Marcuson. They dropped us in there and had a large fire bust and like Alaska, huge, huge, state, and I was kind of more used to down here. When we'd have fire calls, we'd say how many air miles and such and such degrees, ya know. Well, they, I'm sure, do that to. But the difference was when we'd on the old Doug down there they'd
say well, you know you didn't ask how many miles, it seemed to 
me, but how many hours you were going to have to fly. Well, oh 
shoot, ya know, we're going to fly about 3 1/2 hours, northwest. 
My gosh, you'd fly forever and in those beaters and they took us 
out there and dropped us and, of course, they said, you know, 
don't worry about packing out because you're not going to make it 
out, don't even worry about it. Just sit there and somebody will 
come and pick you up and so that's what they did. They dropped us 
out there and it was a little fire and it burned the little 
Spruce trees and, of course, the tundra was there and chop down 
at the ice, permafrost, I mean and it wasn't that problem getting 
a fire out.

Then, praytell, when they tell stories about mosquitoes in 
Alaska, they probably aren't exaggerating, I swear Almighty, the 
mosquitoes were there and we got the fire out, I wished sometimes 
that we'd let the fire go and we just stay in the smoke. But 
anyway, we put the fire out and we sat there for, I believe it 
was, 53 hours. Sitting there fighting mosquitoes, waiting for a 
helicopter and if there's anybody that's ever jumped while you're 
waiting 53 hours, you probably in that interim have heard 17 
helicopters you've thought come. You sit there is it that one? 
No, no, no. And it rained and it rained and at that time those, 
the mosquito netting that they gave us, must have been the lowest 
bid, as usual, for the government and when it rains the glue on 
the mosquito netting comes apart. So I can remember that we tried 
to salvage the largest piece we could out of the two nettings and 
we tried to drape it over us and we sat back to back and played 
about a million games of battleship while we tried to keep 
covered with the netting and keep from going insane from the 
mosquitoes. [laughter]

There are stories of Chancey Kroll, another guy that jumped 
up there and he was up there for seven days out there on a fire, 
ya know, waiting to get out. I thought my God, we had a short 
time compared to seven days. But uh, oh yeah, that's Alaska, 
big, big state. I jumped out by Kotzebue once, you know they 
have stories which is true, they dropped, gee, how many did they 
drop of us, there were eight of us or something like that, or 12 
or something. We were the first people on it, the fire's only 
5,000 acres, ya know, where do you even start? The guys from 
Alaska they were a little bit more used to that. You can't go 
there with the idea that you're going to be there for sometime, 
ya know, kind of set up base camp, ya know. It's not quite the 
same, at least on some of the fires I was on with them. And you 
just start beatin' it out with a spruce limb or whatever which 
was a completely different technique than we had down there and 
that was interesting. Probably Alaska, the vastness of it and 
some of the fire experiences up there.

END OF THE INTERVIEW