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Interviewee: Murray Braden
Interviewer: Tedford Lewis
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Tedford Lewis: This is an interview of Murray Braden, a smokejumper during CPS [Civilian Public Service] days, in the years 1943, '44, and '45.

Murray Braden: I was a smokejumper in '44 and I was the educational director of the camp at '45 and they wouldn't let me be a smokejumper and be an educational director to my disappointment. But by that time I was in it, and there was no way I could fight it, really. So I smokejumped just in the '44 season.

TL: This interview is being carried on at Camp Paxon, Seeley Lake, on the occasion of the fourth reunion of smokejumpers from CPS unit 103. CPS unit carried on smokejumping activities for the Forest Service in years 1943, '44, and '45. This is Tedford Lewis interviewing Murray Braden. Murray, tell us your name, where you're from, and we'll go on from there.

MB: My name is Murray Braden. My full name is Charles McMurray Braden, but since my father's first name was Charles, I was quickly just simply called Murray and it's been that ever since. I'm from Minneapolis, Minnesota, where we've lived for 40 years. Do you want me to embellish that, or have I answered your question?

TL: You can embellish that a little bit. I'd certainly like to know where you lived before you came into CPS.

MB: Well actually, I was born in Santiago, Chile. My parents were Methodist missionaries and they came back to the United States in 1922. We moved around a few times and ended up in Evanston, Illinois in 1927. I lived in Evanston fifth grade through eighth grade and then through high school. Attended Northwestern University, two years at Chicago Theological Seminary. I never really got back to Evanston in any meaningful way after that. Because I went into CPS in 1942. How much of this do you really want?

TL: Whatever you're—

MB: Ok. All right. I had been very active in the student YMCA at Northwestern and that led me to going to Chicago Theological Seminary after Northwestern. I was there from 1939 to 1941. By this time I had registered for the draft in 1940. I had registered as a conscientious objector. I had decided to pass up the certain deferment I could have had as a 4—I believe it was the 4-E classification, a seminary student, on the grounds that I felt I ought to take some responsibility for believing in the conscientious objector position. And I had sort of helped some of my friends, influence them into taking that position. I didn't want to chicken out on it. So I took a
job at Northwestern University as associate secretary of the YMCA in the fall of 1941. My meeting with the draft board came up about four days after Pearl Harbor, in 1941, and to nobody’s surprise, the draft board put me in 1-A. But I just wrote in an appeal and didn’t have to go through with the appeal. They changed it to 4-E because I have been very active in the peace movement at Northwestern University, in the Peace Action League. I had been the leader. I had done the—yeah, the leader of a mass strike against war in the fall of 1939, I believe, at Northwestern, at which about 85 percent of those present took the Oxford Oath against participation in war outside the continental United States. Anyway, I had a lot of background in peace activities and I guess the draft board reconsidered, and they gave me the 4-E classification. And that came through in about New Year’s Day ’42, and on February 20, ‘42 I went off to Coshocton, Ohio. CPS 23. I’ve forgotten what question I’m answering.

TL: [laughs] I’d like to ask you a question: You must have been there at the time that Elsie Swenson and Howard Schomer were at CTS, Chicago Theological Seminary.

MB: I don’t remember Elsie Swenson [who was Schomer’s wife], but Howard Schomer, I think he was two years ahead of me at CTS and before I got there he had taken a very widely publicized position against registering. I think he refused even to register for the draft. It was on the front page of the Chicago Tribune and so forth. And so Howard was not at the seminary at any time I was there. I don’t know where he was. It might have been a long holding period while he was awaiting trial. Anyway, I never saw Howard in the flesh until about 15 years ago when he came and spoke at our church in Minneapolis.

TL: Is that right? Howard is spending a good deal of time in Minneapolis, or has in recent years. So, I think we have something of a background of what led you into the position, took you into CPS. What camps were you in before you came here? Coshocton, any others?

MB: Well, I was pretty much a stay at home, compared to some. I went to, as I said, to Camp Coshocton in February ’42, and I was there until, in the spring of ’44 the opportunity came up to volunteer for the smokejumper unit. And that really intrigued me. I applied and was accepted. So I guess in about April of ’44, I came out to Missoula. I’d like to make a comment here. There’s been a lot written about how CPS was one big boondoggle and everybody spent their time chopping big logs into little ones and so forth. That hasn’t been the case for me. I’ve been lucky enough to have done what I consider to be significant work all the way through CPS. At Coshocton I was in charge of...The camp worked with a hydrologic research station for the Soil Conservation Service, and they tried to pull in people who had had some kind of scientific background. I had been a physics major at Northwestern. And anyway, I got to be in charge of an overland flow project. We hauled a big tank out on the hills and the fields and with various devices set up plots and passed control flows of water through the stubble and the vegetation. Timed the speed, checked the erosion and so forth. And we were able to really establish a very fundamental point relative to soil erosion. Well, the chief factor, I think, in soil erosion is the velocity of the moving water. And we found that the most—by all odds—the most significant controller of the velocity of the moving water is the plant density. Or, rather, the plant stem
density. The number of stems per square foot, something like that. And after our work, there’s just no question about it. If you’ve got a lot of plant stems, the water doesn’t move fast. If you don’t have many, it roars.

TL: They also did work on percolation, as I recall, at Coshocton.

MB: Yes. Coshocton had some very fine pieces of equipment and they’re still using them. Do you want me to go into that at all, or is that getting us afield?

TL: That might be a little bit less afield because we’re interested in the things that led you to Missoula and the smokejumper program. And your philosophy has led us into CPS, and CPS Coshocton has led us into Missoula. What was your reaction when you first arrived in Missoula? When you first saw the camp?

MB: Well I had a lot of reactions. Let’s say the one that I remember the most clearly is the difference between the attitudes of the civilian population in Missoula to the CPS men. The difference between their attitude and the attitudes of the people in Coshocton toward the CPS men at the Coshocton camp. We were persona non grata at Coshocton. Some of our men had been brought up in the Methodist Church and when they got to the camp, since we had the day off on Sunday, some of them would make arrangements to try to visit some of the Methodist churches. And after this has been going on less than three months we got a letter from the district superintendent of the Methodist Church—the camp got a letter—asking that the men not come to the church. And some of the men, who had really been very devout Methodists and so forth, were very crushed by this, to say the least.

TL: I remember that letter coming in.

MB: That’s right, you were at Coshocton. I had forgotten that. Maybe you don’t agree with what I say about it. [laughs]

TL: No, I do agree.

MB: No, it was a significant project. There was an element of boondoggle, but it was a pretty small element.

TL: Well, there was the occasion when they were instructed to dig a pit for a percolation test of some sort, and the fellows said, “How large?” “Well you just keep digging until we tell you to stop.” So they got to digging, and that afternoon the man came by who was in charge, and said, “My God, what have you done here? Fill it up and dig a hole such and such a size!” He wasn’t accustomed to people who got out and really worked.

MB: You know, I hadn’t heard that story. I thought I’d heard them all, but I hadn’t heard that one. We had some fellows at Coshocton that were breaking big rocks into little ones, but
actually they were using those little rocks. They ground them into limestone and put them on the fields. [laughs] No, I forgot you were at Coshocton. I’ve got to watch what I say. [laughs]

TL: [laughs] I’ll track you here. What sort of training did you find? We saw a video tape this morning of training that’s currently used for smokejumpers. How did that compare with the training that you got when you arrived?

MB: Well, it was pretty similar. I imagine a lot of the interviews have covered that ground. We didn’t have—well, I notice in this tape of the more modern practice, the people would jump off a tower, as we did, but then instead of just hitting the end of a rope and dangling, they came to the end of a rope which was on a trolley, which was on a wire, and then roared downhill and hit the ground at a pretty good lateral speed. Which I think is darn good training. We should have had some of that because this prepared them for landing when there’s a strong wind blowing the parachute. We really didn’t get any of that kind of training. So I think that was superior. It seemed to me from that short reel that they are now paying much more attention to the muscular development of the men. I don’t remember anybody telling us we had to do so many pushups or we’re out of the unit, etcetera. They just had us do vigorous exercise and—torture pegs and crawl through culverts and climb over walls and climb up ropes. But I don’t believe it was systematic muscle building. Little more informal.

TL: Little more informal and perhaps because they were very glad to get some men who could do it, and they couldn’t afford to keep one out of 10 who applied from CPS.

MB: Right, good point. They couldn’t afford to be so choosy, I’m sure.

TL: Right.

MB: And I think a lot of our guys—and that may very well have included me—really we were not Tarzans, we were not muscle men. We were just willing and after a good amount of training with shovel and pick and so forth, I think we were pretty hard workers and could keep it up. But we weren’t going knock out Joe Lewis, or anything like that.

TL: And today they require two years of previous fire camp experience before they will let a person into smokejumpers. And apparently you had none before you came.

MB: Well, we had—you may remember this. We got up a fire unit at Coshocton. We had a flat truck with a big tank on it. We roared around and helped farmers fight fires. This might have been after you left.

TL: I must have left.

MB: But this wasn’t forest fire fighting. We fought grass fires and I remember once we got to a farmhouse and all we could do was watch it burn down, it was so far gone when we got there.
But we were able to spray water on the adjoining buildings and we kept them from burning down. But that was one of the saddest sights that I experienced for a good time there—standing there watching that family watching their house burn down. Really gets you.

TL: We had a similar experience at Ninemile, in ’43, so I empathize there. What was the most exciting fire you were on?

MB: Well, the ’44 season was pretty quiet. I actually was only on three fires. They were all quite different. It was a wide spectrum. The most interesting fire, I guess, was what they call the Granite Ridge fire. This was on the side of a ridge, which I think was 11,000 feet high. Now that seems a little strong. But it was a big, long ridge and had a lot of granite rockslides on it, hence the name Granite Ridge. And the fire was moving up the side of it. We were called out at about 8 o’clock in late August, so by this time it was getting dark much earlier than, say, in June, and we jumped to the landing spot just as it was getting dark. There was just about enough light to pick our packs and parachutes and so forth. And we were two miles from the fire, and the only way we really knew how to get there was to go along the top of the ridge. And we did most of this in pitch darkness. I think we got to the fire at 2 a.m. I later have mentioned this to a ranger, and he said, “I know that ridge. I wouldn’t walk along it in the daytime.” We would walk along, guided by the little lamps mounted on our heads, and you’d bend over once in a while, and look down. Here’s a 50-foot drop right in front of you, and so forth. Well happily, nobody went over one of those. We did get to the fire—

TL: You weren’t roped together.

MB: No, no. We did get to the fire. It was a big one. We worked all the rest of the night, trying to get a line around it and had not succeeded. By mid-morning, the sun had come out and it was very warm and I have never seen a more welcome sight than the sight of a big Ford Tri-motor coming in and parachuting down great big 10- or 20-gallon tanks of water. I have never had such an appreciation for water as we did that morning. Anyway, we kept up the work on this fire until about 4 in the afternoon. We had now been on the fire—well, a long time. And we had actually started moving toward it about 8 p.m. the evening before. Okay, about 4 in the evening a strong wind came up, right up the slope, and it blew the fire up into the crowns of the trees, and then it really moved fast and there wasn’t a thing we could do. In fact, we were told, get out of there. We were in radio contact with the Forest Service. So we went to the top of the ridge—not in front of the fire, beside it. And just over the top of the ridge, say about 50 yards down, there was a big rockslide which was itself about 50 yards wide. By this time it was evening, and we were sitting on this rockslide swatting embers—they were blowing up over the ridge and landing on our clothing. For a while I had a shirt and a jacket, I guess, just perforated with little black holes and so forth.

MB: And Harry Burks, who was our radio man, would keep phoning in to Vic Carter at Missoula, “Well Vic. I got to stop for a minute now. The tree I’ve got the antenna tied to is burning down. Will put up another, call you in a minute.” Sounded like a beleaguered crew.

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MB: So we sat up there swatting embers until about 11 in the evening. And the radio word came through from Missoula, go on down to the bottom of the ridge and get some sleep. Because by this time we had been at it a long time. You got me rambling here. So we slid and scratched and slithered and so forth down that mountain. I think it was probably two or three thousand feet vertically. Until we finally could hear a stream rushing. You don’t dare stop anywhere on the side of one of those when there’s a fire around, because if it drops below you—say embers are thrown below you and then are blown upwards, you’ve had it. So we had to go all the way down to what we were convinced was the bottom of that slope. Finally we heard water, and pretty soon we came to a rushing brook, and it took about two minutes for everybody to have his sleeping bag out of the pack, unrolled, z-ing in the pack and sound asleep. I’ve never seen a bunch of guys fall asleep so fast. Anyway, it ended up on that fire, they walked in many, many, many fire guards. These are people that walk in. They brought in mule trains and so forth. It ended up being a big fire. Our eight men never could have handled it. We might have handled it if the wind hadn’t come up. That’s just the way it worked out.

TL: But the wind often does.

MB: It often does, yeah. Well, I’m sure I over answered that question.

TL: You have had three fires jumps then.

MB: Three.

TL: And you told us about the most exciting. How simple was the least exciting?

MB: Well, ok. The first fire jump was—well, I had various emotions about it. Three days before I went out on it, I had been cleaning you know what out of the mule corrals at the Ninemile Remount. And in going from one corral to another, we had to go up over high fences made out of poles, horizontal poles. And I jumped on into the grass from one to get into the next corral. I failed to see a pole down in the grass, and my foot hit it and I turned my ankle pretty badly. So I was limping around. It really was sprained. But three days later, I was sent in with a fire crew. And I didn’t tell too many people about that sprained ankle, but I had it. By this time it was better, but it was still sore. And we were in Missoula for a little while, and the fire call came in. We went out, flew around...the fire we were supposed to go to turned out to be in the Potlatch Forest. It wasn’t Forest Service country.

So they flew back from that. They found another fire and put out two of our men. I remember Lee Miller was one of them. We saw them go down and their chutes disappear in the trees. And then they decided to go back and pick up the Potlatch Forest after all. In the meantime, it had been a very rough ride. There was lots of up and down drafts. The plane was really bouncing. And I had consumed a malted milk and some orange pop not too long before the fire call came in. I had had the bad taste of vomit in the cab. I remember Dick Johnson, whoever was flying us,
looked back. Did he have any sympathy for me? He had nothing but sheer disgust that I had vomited on his plane. I think I got most of it into a barf bag, but there was a little vomit we had to wipe up. Anyway, my insides were somewhat in a turmoil. And it was actually kind of a relief to get out of the plane, even though the only way to get out of it was to jump out. But I jumped out, I guess, about third or fourth or something, and they told us to aim for some little spot there. And I remember going down among some big trees, and I remember going right [slapping sound] between two big trees, and then kind of slowing down a little, and then just whistling. And a little while later, I stood up and I didn’t know where I was. But I remembered, the cardinal principle was, as soon as you’re down get out that orange flag and lay it out, so they know you’re all right. Well, I had been knocked out. But when I came to, that’s the first thing I did. I laid out the orange flag. And I had landed so hard that my head came down and hit my knees, I guess. That’s what knocked me out. The front pack, the emergency pack, had been jammed into my thighs, and it separated a cartilage in my chest. So here I was, stunned, sore ankle, nauseated, and a separated cartilage in my chest. [laughs] That’s the way Dick Flaharty found me babbling nonsense. But that was all right. Then he and I went to try and find the others. How much do you want of this detail?

TL: We’ve got 45 minutes on the tape, and I want to fill the tape.

MB: Okay. Well, we found Dick Rehfeldt, standing about thirty feet up off the ground, on the lowest limb of a big tree. And it seemed that his parachute had come right over the top of a really high tree. I say it was 180 feet, Phil Stanley says 120. It was big. And Rehfeldt had climbed as far as he could, and then he’d used his rope as far as he could, which—I think they were 80 foot ropes, weren’t they?

TL: 70, as I recall.

MB: Yeah. And that got him down near the lowest limb. Then he climbed down, and he was still about 40 feet off the ground. So I believe Wilmer Carlsen — by this time they had dropped in climbing irons and all that sort of stuff. Wilmer Carlsen took a rope up to him, got him down. And little by little we found the others. They were all right. And we started work on the fire. I got to admit, I probably wasn’t the most useful guy in the world, given my state of vitality there.

TL: At least they didn’t have to carry you out.

MB: Oh, no. No, no. I worked on the fire. Probably not at 100 percent efficiency. And I guess we headed out by late in the day, and we slept that night, and then the next morning we made preparations to go out. It took quite a bit of time to get the chutes. And one of the sheerest exhibitions of what I would call sheer nerve that I’ve seen was produced by Phil Stanley. Dick Rehfeldt was kind of shaken up by his tree landing in that tall tree. His parachute was right over the top of the tree. We were told it was holy writ to bring those parachutes back. I had the feeling that if it killed a man they still wanted the parachute. [laughs] But anyway, Phil Stanley—

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TL: Use it to wrap him up as a shroud.

MB: Yeah. Phil Stanley went up. When he disappeared up into the greenery, we couldn’t see anything, but once in a while we’d hear, “Look out!” and some great big branch would come whirring down. And then, “Look out below!” and another thing would come whirring down, hit the ground. Finally he said, “Here she comes!” and Phil had wrapped that whole parachute. He was in climbing irons, you know. He had wrapped it all up in a neat bundle, and here it came down, in a nice little bag. A lot of nerve. I’ve always admired Phil Stanley a little more as a result. Well, we got the fire out. I guess that fire was spectacular from the point of view that, to get out, we walked to some ranger station and they trucked us to some town, Coeur d’Alene, I guess, on the Milwaukee Railroad. And by gosh, we road home on Pullmans. Lower births. And it took all night to get from Coeur d’Alene to Missoula. Whereas the plane got from Missoula to that area in about an hour, I guess. It was a nice exhibition of air travel versus just about anything else.

TL: It’s a nice way to come home.

MB: Yeah. Oh, it was slick. We were dirty, but that’s not the worst thing in the world. Ok, so, for contrast, the other fire, which was—the one I’ve been describing was the first one. I didn’t think smokejumping was quite all that 100 percent great after this sprained ankle, nauseated stomach, separated cartilage, and being knocked out. The second fire was on a ridge right by the Salmon River. My chute came down and landed on the side of a cedar-type tree, and I came down resting on a big, flat cedar branch, lot of sub-branches. And I was just gently set down until my toes were just touching the ground. It was like being laid gently in a feather bed. And I figured the two landings had about averaged out.

TL: So, you jumped in the year of ’44. And the year of ’45, you became educational director of the camp. What was the felt need for the educational director? They didn’t have one in ’43.

MB: No, they did.

TL: Did they? In ’43?

MB: I don’t know about ’43. But in ’44, Roy Wenger was the camp director, and they had brought in Art Wiebe as assistant director and educational director. I had drawn duty, it wasn’t my doing, during the—well, people got all kinds of duty during the summer of ’44, and I was assigned part of the time to the office in Ninemile. I helped mimeograph the newssheet for the camp and I ran the little store that the guys had and did a lot of other things. So I already was doing some office work, though I also did a lot of haystack work and wood splitting work. But among other things, I did that. Well, anyway, when Roy Wenger left, they made Art Wiebe camp director, and they wanted an educational director and Wiebe asked me if I would do it. Well, by this time my wife was living in Missoula—she had come out from Ohio—and I got to

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admit, it was the thought of being able to get in to see her once in a while was nice, and that
would happen a lot better if I was educational director than off at Moose Creek or something,
or off on a slash burning project. And I was interested in the work, so I took it. So I was
educational director through the late fall and the winter and the spring, and I was fully counting
on the fact that when the fire season started, I could go back, get refresher training. But I don’t
know what the deal was. I think Vic Carter didn’t like me very well or something. I had done
something he didn’t like.

TL: That was not uncommon.

MB: During the fire season. And the edict came down, no dice. He’s either got to give up the
educational thing or this. You can’t make a choice. Well, other people had—some of the guys
were working in the radio station in Missoula, and they could still jump. But anyway, I guess I
felt some obligation to stick with the educational director job and so I did. I regretted that
decision some too, I must admit. Because the ’45 season was a very busy one. The people were
just going in and out, one man, I just found out, made three fire jumps in one week, for
example. But I had made the decision, so—

TL: You stayed with it.

MB: I stayed with it, yeah.

TL: So there was some conflict in ideas, occasionally, with the Forest Service and the unit in
1944, ’45. There was some in 1943, I know.

MB: I guess. I wasn’t too aware of that. It seemed to me that Roy Wenger—well he’s a very fine
man, and I think he dealt very successfully with the Forest Service, and I think there was good
rapport. And Wiebe is a very good negotiator and so forth and there was good rapport. Vic
Carter was—I don’t think all the Forest Service men were all too hot about him either. He was
kind of a, a little bit of a dictator. And I think he was apt to make snap decisions and so forth,
which didn’t always sit too well with people. But I think by and large the relations between the
unit and the Forest Service were very good.

TL: The Forest Service generally.

MB: Yes.

TL: Yes, I think that’s right.

MB: Not Vic Carter so much in particular, but now a guy like Earl Cooley, you couldn’t ask for
better. He was very understanding and worked very well with our men. You know, you bring
this up. I want to get one point, because I don’t think anybody else knows this. One thing the
Forest Service did, that I think was very, very bad, and I don’t mean to wipe out all the very
good things they did by saying this. But I am very critical of this. At the end of the ’45 season, when we had had, oh, I think many hundreds of jumps, and our men had put out all kinds of fires all over the northwest there, the war was over. The Forest Service was anxious to get us out of there and start hiring returning veterans and so forth. They announced in December of ’45 that they were no longer going to pay the money they had been paying that provided for the medical allowance for our men. It was just a unilateral decision. The MCC [Mennonite Central Committee] tried to get them to reconsider that; no dice. Well, we had at least two men in hospitals who had been there for a long time. Archie Keith had been in a body cast for three months, and was still in hospitalization, under, I think, some kind of semi-intensive care. I’m not sure of that. He had been very badly hurt and there was, I think, a couple others that were in bad shape. And the Forest Service was not going to take any more responsibility for funding the medical care for these men.

TL: Or the ongoing of existing—

MB: That’s right. Men already hurt. And to my best knowledge, the MCC picked that up. I haven’t been brooding over this, but I was actually the camp director when it closed. Because Art Wiebe left and somebody had to be there to process all the transfers and releases and so forth, and I was very indignant about Archie Keith, for example, being left in the hospital with no support from the government whatsoever. And I wrote Senator Burton Wheeler a letter. The only reason I remember this, I was cleaning out files the other day, preparatory to moving. And Wheeler, Senator Wheeler wrote [Gen. Lewis B.] Hershey [who initiated the CPS]. And Hershey wrote Wheeler, and I got a copy of it, and Hershey pretty much took our point of view. He said he had been agitating for some time that any agency that used the CPS men should provide insurance for them. But apparently there was no way he could force the Forest Service’s hand. And I wrote Wheeler again. And I became discouraged and convinced that I couldn’t get any more by that approach. By that time my final transfer and release came through, and I really couldn’t stay around and follow the thing up. I was extremely relieved to find out at this reunion—now this is some 43 years later—that Archie Keith did come out of that and he had a successful life, career, with the railroad and he’s got a nice family and so forth. And I was extremely...you don’t know how relieved I was to see him the other night in good health and so forth.

TL: But the MCC picked up the tab to complete his medical needs.

MB: That’s right. And I’m sure, as far as the Forest Service is concerned, if the MCC hadn’t done it, they would have just let Archie Keith pick it up. Now, again, the Forest Service had done many good things. I don’t want to blot the big picture out. But that particular little thing just grinds my gears.

TL: Perhaps there is a claim against the Forest Service.

MB: Oh, well. You know, we don’t sue. [laughs] We complain, we don’t sue.
TL: [laughs] We complain, but we don’t sue.

MB: Yeah.

TL: Let’s see. Our tape is coming along fairly well. We have probably another five or eight minutes on it at the most. You’ve told us something about the smokejumping activities, you’ve told us about the conclusion of the camp. But what did you do while you were educational director?

MB: Well, it was a challenge, shall we say. Because our men—the great single block of them were at Ninemile, but they were scattered out all over the Montana, Idaho, Washington, Oregon region. We had side camps at Cave Junction, McCall, Idaho, Whisp, Oregon, Big Prairie, Moose Creek, Seeley Lake, and so forth. As I saw it, the principle part of the job was communication. And I put out a little intra-camp paper. Art Wiebe, I think, had started this the year before, and I continued it, called Static Line, to try to keep the men informed of what the others were doing. We tried to get educational materials out to the side camps. We sent out leather kits so the men could make things out of leather. These kits contained tools and supplies. I’ve forgotten some of the things. We brought in speakers, arranged meetings, had a library, sent out books to the side camps, brought them in. It was really—you had to kind of improvise and figure out what seemed to fit the bill, and do your best. I guess some of it did fit the bill, and maybe some of it didn’t. But there was no—it wasn’t a sluff job. There was plenty to do.

TL: We did not have an educational director in ’43, that I recall. Recall none of those. Who provided the materials? Was that provided by MCC, or the Forest Service, or...?

MB: I think we had a little funding for administration. We bought these kits from leather outfits, and then—well, we had boxes made for them, tools and supplies. And then the guys would sort of pay for what they used, something like that. I think it was on an honor basis. I’d frankly guess, maybe if they didn’t pay we didn’t care. It wasn’t a big deal. The leather kit comes to my mind first because I think, maybe, of all the stuff we sent out that was the stuff they really used the most. [laughs]. Or maybe the books. There was a pretty good run on the library.

TL: I imagine that. Is there anything else that you think would be worth bringing up at this time? As you recollect back on these years?

MB: Well, yes. First thing I’d like to say is, I’ve felt, ever since that experience was over, that that was probably the finest bunch of men I’ve ever been lucky enough to be with. They weren’t all college professors, or this that and the other, but they were just very fine men on average. A very good group. And I think the experience was an extremely good one. We were doing a job about the usefulness of which there is absolutely no question. It was absolutely essential work. We could feel good about it. We could feel—I think we all had a feeling in
showing that a pacifist is not a coward, need not be a coward, and was willing to make sacrifices and take risks for good ends, and so forth. I think the country deserves credit for doing, in the heat of a very vicious war, for being willing to make this opportunity available to a bunch of men who had shunned the war, or who had turned their backs on it. We can blast away at the country, but that really was quite a remarkable thing. Especially in light of the fact that the early policy of the Selective Service, as I saw it, was not to put COs in any activity which would look respectable or attractive. I may be doing them an injustice, but just looking at the decisions they had made about what they would credit and what they wouldn’t, that seemed to be the policy. But here they did not follow that. We certainly look pretty good, and to follow up something that started earlier, we were well received in Missoula. When I got out here, I found that Harry Burks, for example, was the Sunday school superintendent at the Methodist Church in town. Dave Flaccus had married the daughter of the dean of the business school at Montana State University and we were welcome in many homes in Missoula. There were people that didn’t like us. My wife was fired...Have we got time for a little anecdote?

TL: Sure.

MB: I came out to Missoula in, say, about April of ’44, and my wife had been teaching school in Ohio, and she honored her contract and stayed ‘til the end of the school year in May, I guess. She came out to Montana and found a room in Missoula and then got a job in, I believe it was an insurance office. One of the operators of the office was the brother of Clarence Streit, of Union Now. Or is it Strait? [Clarence Streit]

TL: I’m not sure.

MB: And so she was a secretary there. Well, some time after that, they found out that her husband was a conscientious objector, and they fired were. Well, that wasn’t too tragic for Geraldine, because in the meantime, she had been asked to teach at the nursery school, the demonstration nursery school at Montana State University. So it didn’t shatter her, except it was humiliating. Now to finish the story, that fall Clarence Streit’s brother was out on a hunting expedition, up in the woods, and I don’t know if he had a heart attack or what, but he became incapacitated, and our men went in, jumped in there and carried him out.

TL: Any comment after that from Clarence Streit?

MB: None that I know of.

TL: [laughs] These things happen. We were often visited by memories and things that have happened in the past.

MB: Well, I thought really, that kind of exemplifies, in a way, the Quaker view of how you handle conflict, or something. Return good for evil, and so forth.
TL: Any other comments? We have a few moments more.

MB: Can you suggest anything?

TL: Offhand, no. Some of the things you’ve said have made me think of things that I might have said when I was being interviewed, but this is your interview not mine. So. We’re pausing here while Murray thinks.

MB: Well, this reunion is—this is the fourth. They’re always kind of an emotional experience. There’s something about getting back with this bunch that leaves me sort of one-third choked up most of the time. Because it’s really such a fine group of men. They’re very different in occupation, in how much education they’ve had, but they’re just uniformly a fine, fine group. And I’m proud of having been one of them.

TL: Some of your best friends have come out of this group, or no?

MB: Yes.

TL: I think that’s kind of a universal experience, that out of CPS and out of smokejumpers we had developed some of our closest friendships.

MB: One of our men who just died, Lloyd Hulbert, came to live with us in Minneapolis. He took a room in a house we had just bought in Minneapolis in 1948, and then came back again in 1952 to finish up some graduate work. And we found—there was a very lovely young woman in our church choir, and I thought, that’s just the girl for Lloyd. And my wife thought so too. So we set up a date. The movie Red Skies over Montana was being shown in town. And so Geraldine and I and Lloyd and this Jean Smaltz, the girl we were talking about, got together and it really clicked. And couple of months later, Lloyd woke me up early one morning to tell me, “I’m engaged.” And he married Jean and they had three very fine boys. They’re doing very useful work now. But Lloyd died—I was best man—

[End of Interview]