This is Roxanne Farwell with the Smokejumpers Oral History Project at the University of Montana and I'm interviewing Charles Clemensen. July 21, 1984. OH# 133-17

RF Can you tell me when you were born?

CC I was born on June 6, 1925.

RF And where were you born?

CC San Francisco, California.

RF Oh, close to me. Can you tell me some, just kind of outline your background before you became a smokejumper.

CC When I was about two years old, we moved to the town of San Pedro in southern California, a suburb of Los Angeles. I went, I attended elementary, junior high and high school there. My father was in the merchant marines and he eventually became captain of a ship and used to haul lumber from Oregon or Washington down to Los Angeles harbor. I graduated from high school in early 1943 and before too long I was in the Army, served in the Army for two and a half years in the infantry in Europe. And uh, came back uh, attended to Compton College my first two years and completed my college education at the University of Southern California. And after that I... oh I should say before I went to the University of California was when I participated in the smokejumpers or during that period I should say, the years 1948 and 1949. Was that what you wanted to know?

RF Sure, that was good. What attracted you to smokejumping?

CC Friend of mine at Compton College, who oddly enough became my brother in-law, had already been in the smokejumpers in 1946 and 1947 at Cave Junction, Oregon. And he told me about it and it sounded... not only like it would be something that was fun and adventurous but also doing something in a good cause. And those two things appealed to me and so I, he told me where to write and I sent a letter to Cave Junction in oh, let's see would have late 1947 or early 1948 and they sent me back an application which I filled out and I was accepted for the Cave Junction crew.

RF Was smokejumping good pay for temporary work?

CC Not particularly. I could have made more money in some other summer jobs. It was average I would say, uh, there were jobs that paid less, there were jobs that paid more, but it was about average. It was not the pay that attracted me.

RF So let's see, you were about 22 or so when you started jumping?

CC 23, 23 yeah.

RF And you trained then at Cave Junction?
CC Right.

RF Mmm mmm. Can you tell me what was involved in the training?

CC We trained... trying to remember the time span, I think we trained for two weeks before we made our first jump. And that training consisted of physical condition through calisthenics and running. And then uh, getting us acclimated to jumping by use of uh, the shock tower, the let down wire, the... I don't know what you call it, the rope that you'd swing on and then drop off and tumble in the sand pit, in the sawdust pit. They had little small mock up of an airplane to get you accustomed to sitting in the door of the plane and then jumping out and a number of things like that. Then after that initial two week period, then we started our practice jumps and as I recall, we made eight practice jumps before we were considered ready to go on fire jumps.

RF Remember that first jump?

CC Vividly.

RF How'd you feel?

CC Scared, everybody was rather scared I think when they went up for their first jump if they had never jumped before. Now we had some people that had served in the airborne during World War II and they had made jumps before so they knew a little bit of what to expect. But for those of use who hadn't been in the airborne, this was our first jump and we looked forward to it with some apprehension.

RF Can you remember anything as you were getting ready in the door and spotter was getting ready to tell you to go?

CC Yeah, yeah I was, I was uh, I knew what was going to happen, that was the beauty of the, I guess you'd call it conditioning that they put us through. For instance, when we were on the shock tower, they'd hit us on the shoulder and that was a signal to jump and then we'd come to the end of the rope and we'd bounce up and down. When we got in the mock-up, they'd hit us on the shoulder and we went out. We stood on this platform with the rope and they hit us on the shoulder so that when you got in the airplanes for your first jump and you felt that tap on the shoulder, it, you were conditioned like Pavlov's dog, you just went, you know. And I was sitting in the door of the plane there waiting for him to cut the engine and get that tap on the shoulder and out I went and after that the uh, the uh, it was a, replaced, the apprehension was replaced by a feeling of excitement. When I got on the ground, a feeling of extreme euphoria and everybody that ever jumped has told me the same thing, that you want to go right back up and do it again.

RF Yeah, yeah.
CC  Great feeling!

RF  So you looked forward to all your jumps.

CC  Yeah, after that then I think you, you... a lot of the apprehension was gone and you, you know, you found out that you could do it and there was nothing all that scary or dangerous about it. If you did what you were told to do and remembered all the safety procedures that you were taught and and then they got to be fun. Of course had a contest to see who could get closest to the target on the ground and it, we got so we really enjoyed it.

RF  Any events during the training or people really stick out in your mind?

CC  Yeah, several people, one of whom is here at the, two of them, of whom are at the reunion. Starr Jenkins and Roger Wolfertz trained with me in 1948. That's another thing that was interesting about the job, Starr was from Albuquerque, New Mexico, Roger was from Chicago and I was from southern California and... we, it was a chance to meet people of diverse backgrounds once again as the Army had been you know. And I had gotten so I liked that, you know. It was, I found that extremely interesting to talk to people from other parts of the country and find out how they lived and what was going on in other parts of the United States. I thought that extremely interesting.

RF  Were they about the same age, twenties or so?

CC  Our crew, our group down there was divided into, pretty much into two distinct age groups. Those of us who had been in the service would fall in just about the same age, 23, 24, 25 right in there, then... the uh, let's say, that would be about half of us I would say and about 40% were younger men who had just come out of high school or maybe been out of high school a year and they were 18, 19, 20 years old. Then there were a few who... well I guess that was about it. They were all about in that age group I think. I think there were a couple that were uh, a little bit older. They either, they didn't go to school, they were working and I think maybe they had, some of them had been in the service and some of them hadn't I don't think, for one reason or another. But for the most part it divided into those two age groups.

RF  Yeah, do you remember your first fire?

CC  Mmm mmm uh, do you want me to describe it?

RF  Sure.

CC  It was an interesting fire at that. We got a call to jump in the, on a fire that had been spotted in the Klamath National Forest in northern California. And it was, we were told that it was in that are known as the Marble Mountain Wilderness Area, which is a beautiful place, it's been preserved as a wilderness.
area to this day I understand. There are no roads in there, just trails and there's... I think about the only thing that's allowed in there, or the only thing that was allowed at that time was cattle grazing. They didn't allow any logging in there but they did allow local ranchers to drive their cattle up into the upland meadows.

We got to that area in our, in our aircraft, saw a plume of smoke rising. It was a very still day and it was rising straight up, and after we had jumped, or even before we had jumped, we could see that it was on the shore of a lake, a small lake, that, see on one side I think it would be the, probably the north side was, at the base of uh, very steep granite cliff. On the side that the fire was on, it was a slight slope upwards and very heavily wooded. The fire was started by a camper and or campers. We could see where they'd had their campfire and apparently had been careless in extinguishing it. It was a very small fire, it only consumed about a quarter of an acre of underbrush and we had a line around it in less than an hour and it was easily put under control. All we had to do was watch it. The interesting part about it is, that lake did not show on the Forest Service maps of the Klamath National Forest.

RF Huh.

CC They had, they had, they were unaware of its existence. When we got back to camp, when we gave our report on the fire, told Cliff Marshall, who was our foreman, about it. We talked about naming that lake and we decided to call it, in our report, the Secret Lake Fire and it is known today on the Forest Service maps of the Klamath National Forest, as Secret Lake.

RF Oh, neat. Great, huh. Now were most of the fires you jumped pretty small like that?

CC They were supposed to be. If everybody was doing their job right, we were saved for small, highly inaccessible fires mainly at high altitudes in the mountains. Fires that ground crews would have difficulty in reaching in less than... let's say a day or a day and a half or two days. Whereas we could reach it in a matter of hours. That was the whole purpose of the smokejumpers, to reach fires at high altitudes in the mountains where there was no easy accessibility from the ground.

Sometime signals got crossed and we would end up sending your crew in on a fire that was really a ground control fire. They were right along side dirt roads or something like that. Fires that we never should have been sent on, it was really a waste of the tax payers money to uh, send us on those fires. But for the most part, they tried to restrict it to these high altitude fires. Lightning strikes were the type of fires that the smokejumpers were created for... or as in this case, in the case of the Secret Lake Fire, a camp fire at extremely high altitude where it was impossible to get any kind of a vehicle up to that fire at all.

As an example, when we walked out, we, it took us all day walking out to get to the end of a dirt road and... from there on
of course you could, you could drive a vehicle. But there were no roads up in there so it was an ideal fire for us.

RF Uh huh, yeah. Did you work on any big campaign fires?

CC Not on any, any, any very large ones. The two years that I served uh, in the smokejumpers in the areas that we covered were very slow years for fires. There were very few fires. I only got to jump on, I only got to make two fire jumps, all total, one in 1948, one in 1949, there was a scarcity of fires.

RF Yeah.

CC And we had two fires that broke out in the immediate vicinity of our camp. One right across the road, right across the highway from our camp, that was caused by a sawmill burning at the end of their green chain without any kind of burner or any kind of protection at all. They were burning right out in the open and they, sparks, the wind came up, sparks flew into the, into the woods and set it afire. And that was a fire that required a lot of fire fighters and we went on that fire because we were right there you know. We sent a crew over there and there was another one down the road that was the same sort of thing. It started at the side of an old abandoned saw mill and... since it was just three or four miles down the road, we went on that one. I don't think our people, I never went on any... large fires. I don't remember whether of our other jumpers did or not, I don't think there were too many those two years.

RF Yeah. What was your second fire jump like?

CC Well that occurred the next year in 1949 and was typical of a jump that we never should have been sent on. It was in the Six Rivers National Forest in California. It was arson, it had been set... the uh, there was an old wooden flume that came down the side of this hill that had originally been used in the old days I guess to flume logs down from the higher altitudes. They would run water down this flume and the logs would race down on this wooden flume to... a river or a pond down below and it was, had been standing there for I don't how many years... made out of old, you know, made out of wood at it was old and extremely dry. Some of the local inhabitants had set the fire and, hoping thereby to get employment from the Forest Service of putting it out, [laughs]. They were all standing around the ranger's station waiting to be hired. But, we were, we jumped on that fire and there were three of us that jumped, one of us, one of us was the, one of the jumpers was our foreman, Cliff Marshall and he broke his ankle on that jump.

So it was a fairly wasteful jump, one that should never have been made in the first place, it was easily accessible by road and we never should have been sent on that one. But that's the... the people would in various parts of the Forest Service would call, hadn't been properly indoctrinated into the proper use of smokejumpers and they would call for them and we wouldn't find out until later that they never should have called for them.
RF Yeah. Well it keeps you in shape anyhow.

CC Sure did.

RF When you went back in '49, were you retrained then and given more practice jumps?

CC Yeah, we got some more physical conditioning to get us back in shape. Because over the winter a lot of us were just going to school and had a tendency to get out of shape. And you need to be in good physical condition because you might have to walk out, oh as much as 50 or 60 miles from a fire. And on occasion where they couldn't get, let's say pack mules, in to haul out your hear, you might have to walk out carrying 70 or 80 pounds of gear.

RF Yeah.

CC So you had to be in pretty good physical condition. So we had uh, we had some more physical conditioning. And then we had, I, as I recall one or two refresher jumps before we went on another, another fire jump and... yeah they, sort of retrained us a little bit.

RF Was there a lot of turnover the next year, new jumpers?

CC Yeah there were, I would say, we had a small crew there, only about 25 or 26 men and I would say in 1949 there were... well probably a half of dozen new men. At least a half, at least, I would say at least six new men.

RF Yeah. Were most of them like you jumping, they were college students or just jumping for summer employment?

CC Oh I think about the same ratio, I think, well I think uh, about 50% of us were college students and 50% just, did some other line of work in the winter time and... came to do this in the summer. As an example, one of the squad leaders, Bob Nolan, worked for the telephone company in southern California as a lineman during the winter months and then worked for the Forest Service at Cave Junction in the summer months.

RF Yeah.

CC So, Cliff Marshall, I believe was the only permanent employee there at Cave Junction, our foreman, he stayed there all the time. The Forest Service gave him a house, right at the base and he and his wife and children lived there. And then there was another fellow by the name of... Millard Green who was... at that time he had more jumps than anybody in the outfit. He had about 75 jumps and he worked for the Forest Service year round although not the whole time at Cave Junction. During the winter he worked out of Redding in northern California, but the rest of us were just temporary summer employees.
RF How did the crew relate to the, to the foreman, Cliff Marshall?

CC Oh very well, we, he, Cliff was... he was a good leader. He was... as good boss uh, I always thought, considered him extremely fair, extremely competent. Cliff isn't at this reunion, I'll just give you a little bit of his background, he had quite colorful background. He had started out I guess in life as a logger down at a place called Pelican Bay, which is on... Klamath Lake in southern Oregon. For a time I had heard that he had been a professional or semi-professional boxer. During the war he was a first sergeant in the 101st airborne division and jumped on D-day in Normandy. And then he got out and came to work, hear about the, the smokejumper project and decided that's something he'd like to do. And uh, he was, he was a fine man, fine man to work for. I'm just sorry he's not here at this reunion.

RF Yeah, Did you get any feedback from the military, jumpers, the people that were in the airborne, did, was their equipment significantly different or their way of jumping any different?

CC Yeah, there were two things, well I guess there were a number of things that were different about the military jumping. First of all we were extremely safety conscious and safety procedures were drilled into us. Much more so than in the service. Of course in the service, they had other objectives, other reasons for jumping. We jumped at... they tried to make our jump altitude around 1500 feet every time. This was a safety measure in itself to give... us more time to react. Should some malfunction occur to the main chute, it would give us time to get rid of the main chute and pull the rip cord on the reserve chute. The military of course, the object was to get those men on the ground as quickly as possible and their average jump altitude I think was in the neighborhood of five or six hundred feet, which is barely enough to get that chute open. But you, in combat, you do not want to hang up there any longer than you have to or you're just a sitting duck and some of them were and... those two things I think primarily are the difference between, oh and uh, the chute. We used, it's know today by designation FS-1 and it was the first model of the Derry, that's D-E-R-R-Y Steerable Chute and of course they didn't use that in the military. In the military they used, just a plain old chute without the two slots at the back which made it steerable. But I understand some of the jumpers prior to my time used army surplus chutes that didn't have the slots.

RF I think they used whatever they could get during the war.

CC Yeah, yeah, in the early days of the project they used, it was just a hand to mouth existence I guess.

RF Did you ever hear about the Eagle chutes?

CC No.
Yeah, I guess those were used up through '45 I think at least. They had a pretty mean opening shock. Did you ever have a bad opening shock?

No, it seemed like they were all about the same uh, they were all about the same. And I think that... proved the value of some of the training that, they were no worse than the shock tower that we had trained on. So that it wasn't all that much of a surprise when we got the opening shock. We knew we were going to get it you know and we had been conditioned for it on the shock tower.

Yeah, when you weren't jumping were you used for project work?

Yeah, we were used on a number of different projects and that's another thing that made the job interesting. It kept it from being monotonous. We... at one or another, were used to string telephone line through the forests up to lookout towers. We were used to climb trees and collect seed cones for reforestation projects... what else were we used on? Oh, the first year our camp was at the Red Wood Ranger Station which was right in the town of Cave Junction.

But... we eventually built our new camp out at the airstrip and we built, we, we built the road into the the new camp and built the buildings ourselves and... one of the, one of the interesting projects, to build the road from highway 199 into the camp, uh, we had to take out a number of small Jeffrey Pine trees that grew there. None of them were more than about six or eight inches in diameter. We cut the trees down and blasted the stumps out with dynamite and that was fun, [laughs]. And we'd uh, we'd put anywhere from two to six sticks of dynamite under a stump sometimes just to see how high you could get it.

Did the jumpers take the project work well?

Oh yeah, yeah. Oh another interesting project that we went on, we, three of us had a lot of fun doing this. They gave us a truck, told us which farm to drive to out in the surrounding country. We'd go load the truck with bales of hay, bring these bales of hay back to the... what did they call it, it was at the Red Wood Ranger Station. They had... a big barn there with stalls for horses and mules and these were the horses and mules that they used to go into fires and carry in equipment or retrieve equipment.

Yeah.

And we, we spent several days going out to this farm, getting these bales of hay and taking them back to the barn and stacking them up in the barn. After we got all the hay loaded into the barn and were ready to go back, we'd, we'd usually take a walk down through this central walkway that went between the stalls and look at all the animals and you know pet all the horses and mules. And there was an open sack of oats there and we
thought you know, we'll give them a little treat. So we'd take a handful of oats and let them eat the oats and after a couple days of this the wrangler came to Cliff Marshall and said, tell those guys to stop feeding those animals oats he says, they're kicking the stalls apart, [laughs]. Apparently when a horse or mule gets a lot of oats, they get a lot of energy and if they're not being worked, then they've got to let that energy out some way and they were literally kicking their stalls to pieces, [laughs].

RF Oh no. What did your folks think of your smokejumping?

CC They were proud of me, they thought it was a great thing to do, I had their complete support.

RF Was there an age requirement then for, was it 18 or something that you had to be?

CC Yeah, I think you had to be 18.

RF Yeah.

CC Yeah. I don't know if there was any upper age limit. We didn't have anybody that old.

RF Yeah, no career jumpers yet I guess.

CC No.

RF Were you, your paid a salary.

CC Yeah.

RF OK, and you didn't get any overtime then till you happened to be working a real busy fire?

CC No uh, uh. I, if I remember correctly, subject to correction, we were paid $1.46 an hour. Which uh, was just about medium wages in those days. Other summer occupations paid less, some paid more but I don't think there was a person in it that was in it for the money.

RF Yeah.

CC They were in it for uh, the fact that it represented a good cause, you know, helping to preserve the forests and the thrill of jumping. Where else would they have gotten such an opportunity?

RF Were most of the smokejumpers people that really enjoyed the outdoors?

CC Yes, to a, to a great deal they were, yeah and I noticed, talking to some of them that some of them still are. That they still... contain... the alumni of the smokejumpers still contain a high percentage of fishermen and hunters and campers and naturalists and people of that sort.
RF Yeah. You'd have to, those long hikes out, you'd better like it. Were you jumping when the Mann Gulch Fire, that tragedy occurred?

CC Uh, I'm not sure, I'm not sure what year the Mann Gulch Fire occurred.

RF It was '49.

CC Well yeah, that was my second year jumping. I had thought the, I guess my memory had failed me. I had thought that it was later than that. But... I guess I was jumping when the Mann Gulch Fire occurred, if it was '49 I was.

RF But you don't remember any impact it had on you when you heard about it or anything like that?

CC No, I think, my only reaction to it was that I was sorry to hear that it happened. I, we, after the details came out, we knew why it happened. And it was, I guess it was just an unfortunate things that couldn't have been prevented. They just happened to get trapped in a situation that they couldn't possibly get out of it in time. And, and we all knew that that danger existed. I don't think anybody really dwelled on it, but we knew that it could happen.

RF Did you get a chance to work with other, like the ground crews and all on fires?

CC No, not really. The only... at least on the, on the fire jumps I was on, the only contact we had with ground crews was usually when they came in with pack animals to retrieve our equipment. Or in the case of the fire in 1949 in the Six Rivers National Forest, they, they came in and relieved us. We were pulled out and they came in and took over the fire but that was the extent of it. Now we did get to work one time on a very interesting project, I should have mentioned this under work projects.

RF That's all right.

CC The Oregon Department of Fish and Game, sent one of their men and... to work with and three of us assisted him in a project of hauling fingerling trout into two lakes near Cave Junction. One lake, they were... they were know as Big Tannen Lake and Little Tannen Lake. Big Tannen Lake was accessible by dirt road and we drove up there and put most of these Eastern Brook Trout fingerlings into that lake and then we all put on... a backpack tank that had water in it and several hundred of these little two-inch size trout and we proceeded to climb twelve miles up to Little Tannen Lake. And we got there and we watched the trout as we dumped them into the edge of the lake.

We had about a 50% survival rate which the game warden said was good, that was considered good. He told us to be sure and jiggle up and down quite a bit as we climbed up to, to Little
Tannen Lake because that aerated the water and helped keep the fish alive. But we went up there, deposited the, the fish in, in the lake which hopefully grew to catchable size later on. And it was a warm day so two of us immediately took all our clothes off and jumped into Little Tannen Lake and went for a swim.

RF They've had quite a range of work experience, some of these guys.

CC Oh, it was great, I'll tell you, it was great, that's why I say sometime I wonder if I was smart in going back to L.A. and getting in the rat race. Maybe I should have stayed there, I don't know.

RF Yeah. What made you decide not to come back and give it another year?

CC Oh, you know, dreams of making it big in the world of industry or commerce or something like that. I had, I had majored in mathematics and I wanted to pursue it and that didn't work out for me. But I got into... the lumber business after that and that did work out for me and I spent the last 30 to 35 years in the lumber business and I've enjoyed it very much.

RF Yeah, that's kind of related to smokejumping.

CC Yeah.

RF Yeah, huh. In your acquaintances with all the different smokejumpers, or anybody you see at the reunion, what kind of a person do you think it takes to be a smokejumper? What have you all got in common?

CC I don't know, actually I think we're diverse. Although I think there's a thread that runs... through the... the personnel that were in the smokejumpers. I, it's rather hard to define I think. I think there's this... a little bit of the love of adventure and... and the comradery that comes belonging to an organization of people about your own age and doing something... having some... goal in common. But there was a streak of diversity that ran through... the people that I worked with.

Some of them were, although a lot of us were college students, there was, were more city oriented. There were people that were, shall we say... oriented toward a rural life. I don't think there was any, I don't think there was any one type of person that makes a good smokejumper. I think you have to have a certain zest for an adventurous occupation. And then I think also the... you have to have this altruistic streak... to the point where doing something good for the good of the country, such as preserving our forests, appeals to you. If that, if you're indifferent to the state of the forests in the United States I, you know, I think you would, it would be a conflict toward working in that kind of thing and I think that's the two things, really that bound us together more than anything else.

Other than that we came from diverse backgrounds. I
considered myself a city boy and so did several others. Mainly from the Los Angeles area and there were oh, half a dozen of us from the L.A. area at that time and a couple from the San Francisco Bay area. Then there were those that came from small towns and... had been... oh, either working for the Forest Service in another capacity or maybe grew up on farms and things of, things of that nature. But I think the thing that we had in common were those two things I mentioned.

RF Did your smokejumping experience have a significant affect on your later work in, in the lumber industry?

CC Not from a technical lumber standpoint, no. That, I don't think contributed to my technical knowledge of lumber. But I think that just the over all experience... gave me confidence in myself and increased my own self-esteem I think. And you know, enabled me to... meet other challenges with a... lesser degree of apprehension or fear.

RF With all these people from such diverse backgrounds, did you all find you work well together?

CC Yes, yes I, there was very little, there was very little friction as I recall. We all... we all seemed to... you know, put our shoulders together, as it were, for the common cause. We all seemed to get along fairly well.

RF Yeah. You weren't aware of any like peer groups or cliques of vets and non-vets and what not.

CC No, I think we... we mixed pretty well Some of my, you know, whom I consider my best friends in the group were non-vets. A young man particularly that I remember who was studying for the ministry and he and I used to... oh, maybe go into Grant's Pass together on a weekend or something like that and sit in the park and... talk about theology. Myself being a devout atheist and him being a student of the ministry, we could, we could easily have thrown differing points of view at each other. And we used have very enjoyable discussions and there was no animosity at all and he came from a solidly christian background and I came from a at least an agnostic background. But we liked each other, we respected each other. He was some years younger than I was, let's say four or five years younger than I was and I respected his integrity and his dedication to his point of view and he, as he did mine. And he turned out to be one of my best friends in the whole group.

RF And was he smokejumping for a few years or did he... ?

CC I don't think so. I think he, like me, jumped for, well in fact he was only there the one year that I was there as I recall. There again... to illustrate the diversity of the group, I've always been very fond of classical music and of all the people in the group, I've told you about Cliff Marshall being a logger and a paratrooper and all that. He also appreciated classical music.
Whereas you know, most of the rest of them were in tune with what was the currently popular thing at the time, Stan Kinton's progressive jazz. So we were, there was a, really an element of diversity in our tastes and our outlooks.

RF Yeah, huh. That's one thing I've noticed in all the interviews that I've had with people. They emphasize how well they worked together and even in World War II with the CO's and with the Forest Service.

CC Mmm mmm, the CO's were all gone by the time I got there. But I hear about them and... I had heard also about the... the black paratroops that served in that area during the war, and there again, they were all gone by the time I got there. But in fact... Millard Green, one of the supervisors in our group had been attached to that battalion of black paratroops during the war as a technical advisor on, on jumping into forest fire conditions and he served with them.

RF Yeah, did he have any stories or impressions of the group?

CC He didn't talk too much about it. Except that you know, to say that they had... they had done the job, they had gotten the job done. It was a new a strange experience for them I suppose. Long removed from where any of them had come from, cause I don't think there were any black people living in southern Oregon at all at that time.

RF No, not much around here or anything.

CC Mmm mmm.

RF What were the impressions that you had heard from other people about the CO's?

CC I understand that there was a little bit of friction in Cave Junction between some of the CO's and the townspeople. Which was only natural because... I can imagine that some of the townspeople had fathers and brothers and sons that were in the service. Then to see, you know, someone that... was excused from military service because they consciously objected to serving, is a rather touchy thing.

RF Yeah.

CC And... but I guess it didn't get into anything too serious that I know of.

RF Yeah. Did you get the feeling that all of, you and the foremen and the whole group of smokejumpers worked well with the Forest Service organization? Did it seem as though it was working fairly efficiently?

CC Pretty much so, although I think there was some moss backs in the Forest Service that still didn't think smokejumping was a
wise idea. I, I had the feeling and... bolstered by the fact that... the, the second year that I was there, I spent a lot of time working in the office for Cliff Marshall and helping him. He hated paperwork and I used to make out reports for him and things of that sort. But... I, I had the distinct impression at that time that the whole smokejumper project was on thin ice. That any great degree of... injury to the project might have canceled it out although even after the Mann Gulch Fire, it didn't get cancelled out. But this was why Cliff was such a fanatic about safety, safety precautions and I think the Forest Service still regarded it as somewhat of a step child. And they, you know, they thought it was somebody's crazy idea, go up and have fun jumping out of airplanes. And since I've been here, at this reunion, I saw a letter out at the... aerial...

RF  Fire depot?

CC Fire depot out here, written in 1935 I think it was by some forest supervisor saying he thought it was a crazy idea and he wanted no part of it.

RF  Thought that all people that jump out of a plane were half out of their wits or something.

END OF SIDE A

SIDE B

CC Well it, it... seems like we never had enough money really to operate to, it seemed like whatever appropriation the Department of Agriculture had, they were unwilling to allocate a, any great percentage of it to the smokejumpers. You could not for instance replace a piece of equipment unless you could prove that it was, its loss was directly related to a fire. Now you might for instance have a, let's say a shovel that... got damaged beyond repair just doing maintenance work around the base. But we were not allowed to replace that shovel unless we could say that we lost on the... such and such fire so we would save that broken shovel, [laughs].

RF  To go to the next fire.

CC And when we got back from the next fire, we'd say well, it got broken on that fire.

RF  Dumping out cargo load of stuff on a fire. Did you, what would happen if you came back from a fire without one of you chutes?

CC We'd get hell and that, that happened to me and the fire of 1949, the Six Rivers. We... this other jumper and myself were headed back up onto the ridge to retrieve our chutes, but the foreman of the ground crew that came in said, oh you don't need to go all the way back up there. We'll get your chutes for you and send them up to you and boy did I get balled out by Cliff
Marshall because he says those guys will rip our chutes to pieces. But fortunately they arrived in excellent shape, there was no damage to the chute but Cliff was really upset about that.

RF What would happen if you did come back without it, you just, they didn't dock your pay or anything?

CC No, no, there was nothing they could do. It was a policy that we were supposed to retrieve our chutes. But I, it seemed logical to me that as long as they were up there and we were 1000 feet below them down at the road level, that it was silly for us to waste time going back up there again. And I found out, since I've been at this reunion that a couple of other jumpers did the same thing, [laughs], let the ground crew bring the chutes out.

RF Did you get the feeling that the ground crews thought you were kind of elite or getting relieved off of fires?

CC Yeah, I think there was at least a small amount of elitist feeling toward the, toward the smokejumpers and also on our part. Frankly we did think we were a little bit better most fire fighters. Actually you, it was preferred, at least by Cliff Marshall that you have some fire fighting experience before you got into the smokejumpers. I had none but he, Cliff said when he saw my application that I had been in the infantry, that's all he need, he hired me right then and there.

RF Perfectly qualified to dig a line.

CC And walk out and stuff. Yeah we did get the feeling, I think, that we were... justified or not, we did get the feeling that we were something special. But virtue of the fact that we, we got to our fires the quick way, you know, from the sky.

RF Had another question that I was just thinking of and now I just let it slip out of my mind.

CC But I think young men are easily influenced into thinking they're elite for one reason or another.

RF Was that an impression you had at all before you went into smokejumping?

CC Yeah I had the feeling that this was something, you know, a little above the average.

RF Yeah.

CC I think if someone had told me, well I know a place where you can get out in a blister rust crew, I don't think I would have been interested, you know because you didn't jump out of airplanes in blister rust crews.

RF What's a blister rust crew?
OK, they would hire college students and high school students in the summer time to go to work in crews. Oh, the Forest Service hired these crews and the state forestry departments hired these crews anywhere from southern California up to northern Montana. Let's see, how can I explain this? There's a certain type of insect that boars into trees and... the sign that these trees are infected is a... oh a growth on the bark of the tree that looks like a big blister. And it's a, I guess it's... I've never done this work so I'm speaking from second hand knowledge, it's a rust colored type of thing. These insects come into the woods and the host plant that provides a home for these insects before they attack the trees is the mulberry bush. So blister rust crews' job was to eliminate the mulberry bushes from the forests and that's what they did. Unless they were called on a fire, they did, eight hours a day, they spent chopping out mulberry bushes.

RF Wow.

And now they were, one of the conditions of their employment was that they were at, they were available to go on fires whenever they were needed for that. And I would say oh, at least a third of our crews had... gave their initial experience in the wilderness through blister rust control. That's how they got started with the forest department.

RF Did that kind of work pay as well as smokejumping?

CC Uh, no, I think it paid a little bit less, I think it paid somewhat less than smokejumping.

RF Any other experiences that you had that... impressions that you want to leave? Have we covered things, I'm sure.

CC I think we've covered things pretty well.

RF You weren't a rigger were you?

CC No, no, I never learned how to do that, I, there were... let's see, in addition to Cliff Marshall, there were two or three other that were trained as certified riggers at that... at that base at that time. And two of them were part-time smokejumpers but they had gone through the training to learn how to rig parachutes. And they must have been doing their job right because we never had a chute that failed to open. Although one time I did have one who was known as a Mae West.

RF Uh huh.

CC And uh, where you have a line over and instead of having one, completely round canopy, you have two, two bulbous halves to the canopy like that. I didn't realize exactly what I had at the time because the risers from my harness to the chute were crossed behind my head so that I could not get my head back and look to see what I had. This was on a training jump and... by the time I finally, finally down, got my head back up, the risers separated
and got my head back. Then I found out what I had and I began tugging at the lines to get that line off the top of the canopy and I, it finally slipped off the top of the canopy when I guess I was about 100 feet off the ground. I was coming down at a faster than normal rate of decent and Cliff Marshall was running around wildly on the ground yelling at me through a bull horn to get that, to saw that line back and forth and get it off the top of the canopy. And [laughs]... he was, he was all worried and excited when I got down there and he said, didn't you hear me yelling at you? I said, Cliff I couldn't hear anything up there. I was just trying to get my head back to see what was wrong, you know. I didn't think it was anything seriously wrong, I, it may not have been all that serious. Although I was coming in pretty hot and I might have broken a leg or something but fortunately I got it corrected.

RF Yeah. Was that the only malfunction you saw or experienced?

CC Well the other one was kind of sad. We had... on a training jump in 1949, we had a jumper that came down... and missed the jump field. He'd landed in the trees at the edge of a, edge of a jump, edge of the jump field. Unfortunately instead of hanging up in one tree where his chute would have been completely entangled and he would have been safe. He landed with half the chute hanging on one tree and half the chute on another tree uh, about 80 feet above the ground. And then after the chute collapsed, it proceeded to disengage itself from both trees but he fell about 80, 70 or 80 feet to the ground. And at first it was thought that he had only broken his leg but it turned out later that he had broken his back and he was, of course all through with smokejumping and was on permanent disability.

RF Yeah.

CC And... but I understand that he's still alive and kicking today and functioning very well as, is married and has children. And so... other than, I don't know what the extent of his disability is today. It obviously didn't stop him from leading a pretty normal life, you know, which is fortunate.

RF Yeah. It almost seems as though when you were getting close to a tree that you'd almost just want to aim for it and make sure you got into one.

CC We were told, although I understand the philosophy of the smokejumpers has changed, we were trained to hang up in the trees when, whenever possible. To avoid open spots because they might contain uh, logs or... or boulders that, you know, might be hidden by grass and in fact that was how Cliff Marshall broke his ankle on that jump I was on in 1949 in the Six Rivers National Forest. He had been preaching to us for months to hang up in the trees. Myself and the other jumper hung up in trees and he went into the only clearing for miles around and broke his ankle doing just what he said would happen, he hit a boulder.
RF Yeah, hanging up in a tree might be all right as long as it wasn't too tall of a tree. It must be a problem getting the chutes out?

CC Well it is. It's a bit of a problem... in getting down from a tree, we had a 80 foot let down rope and... so you could hang up 100, 120 feet in some of those trees and even more. Getting the chute down was a bother because you had to put on the climbing spurs and go back up there and sometimes you had to hack branches off to get back up there. Then you had to carefully untangle the chute and try not to tear the nylon and... it was a bother. But it was safer than hitting the ground where you might not know. The other thing that was awfully dangerous about hitting the ground too was a, is a phenomena that occurs sometimes if there's a wind blowing across the ground. You develop what is known as oscillation, like so, and when that happens, there's a procedure for stopping oscillation but sometimes it doesn't work. And you can get slammed into the ground pretty hard if you're, if your chute is oscillating, swinging back and forth like a pendulum. You, if you, if it's timed just right, you could go, whap, flat on your back, you know, with quite an impact and that's another reason for not landing in a clear area and hanging up in the trees. If you're oscillating and you go into a tree, you don't get hurt.

RF Yeah, and you've got the cover over your face and everything so I guess the branches don't bother you.

CC Oh we were pretty, we were pretty extremely well protected and... another thing that was of course of tremendous importance to us was the construction of the jumpsuit itself. And what was unique about it was it had two straps like stirrups that went under our boots and... it, it formed a, how can I say, semi-rigid system that... it was, we were, it was, there was tension from the other side of out boots all the way up one leg through the crotch and down the other side. So that you could come down at a pretty good rate of speed and straddle a branch that was maybe five inches in diameter without any injury.

RF Wow, huh

CC In fact the way Cliff Marshall would test to see if we had out suits on right, because you could adjust these stirrups that went under your boots. When we got our jumpsuits on, he told us to stand with our legs spread and he kicked us right in the crotch, [laughs].

RF Then he found out.

CC And if we had done it right, it didn't hurt.

RF Oh dear.

CC But there was a reason for that and boy I tell you, you were thankful that you had that when you came down into a tree and you
found yourself thunk, right on some branch you know. And if you hadn't, didn't have that, you couldn't do it if you didn't have that jump suit on, built the way it was. It just, then you would not have been able to go into trees because you could have gotten very badly injured.

RF Right. That's interesting. You got a lot of experiences for those two summers.

CC Yeah, well it was, it was, it was, fascinating and I absorbed a lot of detail. It stuck, and it was, it made some very vivid impressions on me obviously and stuck in my mind all these years.

RF Yeah, that's great.

CC And yeah, it was one of the high points of my life, you know. I enjoyed it immensely. Oh, there were times when it was just plain hard, hot, dirty work. Like you know, when you were fighting a big fire and hacking a fire line around the fire and it was, the temperatures got to extremes and you know, this was in the heat of the summer and, and... you know, there was just a, you were just exhausted by the time you got done putting a line around the fire sometimes. But... it had, it had a lot of light hearted moments. We used to go out on work projects... in trucks from the smokejumper base in Cave Junction in the surrounding country side as I say either clearing trail or stringing telephone line or... getting seed cones or getting hay or something like and on the way back, the driver would always drive by this one saw mill that had a log pond. And we'd secretly pick on somebody that we'd plan to throw into the log pond, [laughs]. We'd stop, throw him into the log pond and then we'd go on back to camp, [laughs].

Another fellow and myself, as soon as we got back to camp, we ran down to the... bath house where the showers were and we kicked our swimming trunks down then we put our swimming trunks on then ran down the road to the... Illinois River which was right behind out camp and there was a swimming hole there that was about ten feet deep. The Illinois River was, at most points not more than two or three feet deep but this one hole cut into the bank there. The water had eroded a how about ten feet deep. That water was icy cold, it came right out of the Siskiyou Mountains. The only way to get in it was all at once, you know, dive right in. But it was certainly refreshing and every night we'd run down there and jump into the Illinois River. And... we had, it became a ritual, we had to do that before we ate supper.

RF Yeah. Huh, great. Any other experiences you want to add?

CC One interesting experience I think, the second year I was there, 1949, this I believe I mentioned before, this saw mill across the road, due to careless burning of scrap, bark and things like that, started a fire in the woods right along side highway 199. We went over there, we sent a crew over there, I didn't go along, I stayed behind to man the office but we sent a crew over there to fight the fire. But the fire crowned, I don't
know if anybody's explained what a crown fire is.

RF It goes up into the...

CC It goes into the, yeah, into the tops of the trees where it burns. It just leaps from one tree to another with lightning repetitity and after awhile, after it gets going real good, it creates its own draft. It uses up all the oxygen in the immediate area of the fire... oxygen from the surrounding air then rushes in to fill the void and the fire then just leaps forward and can attain speeds as high as 40 and 50 miles an hour.

RF Hmm.

CC When a fire crowns, there is absolutely no chance of controlling it. All you can do is get out of the way and... the fire was heading in a northeasterly direction toward the Illinois River. And we said, we assumed that when it got to the Illinois River, that's where it would stop. It never even slowed down, it jumped the Illinois River and kept right on going. Now by this time, when it jumped the Illinois River it was now a threat to the, the town of Cave Junction itself. But there was still nothing we could do, it was still crowning. So the only thing we could do was to send our people out there with trucks and evacuate people who lived in the woods near Cave Junction. Because they were in danger of getting their houses burned down and a couple of them did and... so that was, at that point this was the only thing we could do. We took the truck and we got people and a few of their treasured belongings out before the fire hit. Fortunately the wind shifted and it stopped before it actually hit the town of Cave Junction and... but that was an interesting fire.

RF Yeah.

CC It ended up costing that saw mill a bundle of money too.

RF Yeah? Huh, I bet you were lucky or you felt lucky that you didn't have to jump something like that.

CC Oh yeah, yeah.

RF Just being stuck out in the wilderness in something like that.

CC Yeah, a crown fire is a, is a frightening thing. The other fire that we went on that year that occurred in an old abandoned saw mill. Again it crowned and went up the side of a hill, much the same thing happened at the Mann Gulch fire. But we were fortunate in that we saw it coming and we got out. And we got big equipment into this fire. We got bulldozers in there to build wide fire trails you know, like 10, 20 foot fire trails on either side of the fire and we contained it that way.

RF Mmm mmm.
But I happened to be standing in one of these wide fire trails as the fire went up the hill. And... to show you the hysteria that it induces among animals, a chipmunk ran out of the woods, ahead of the fire and climbed up on the toe of my boot and sat there to get its breath for a few minutes and I just stood there and watched him. And he was doing a thing that he normally would never have done because their fear of humans, I guess, is exceeded only be their fear of fires. And he was so out of his mind with fright that he climbed up on my boot and sat there.

Huh, wow. Well that's, that's an excellent accounting of those two seasons. You have a phenomenal memory.

Thank you. Yeah well, like I say, something that happens in you life that's unique. That certainly was unique if nothing else.

Well is there anything else you'd like to add?

No, I can't think of anything. This reunion, [National reunion in Missoula, MT. 1984] has been very pleasant. I've seen a couple of people that I worked with at Cave Junction and met a lot of very nice people. Most of the people here are from the Missoula station. But they seem to a very friendly group of people and I've enjoyed meeting them.

Well thank you very much.

You're entirely welcome, it's been my pleasure.

END OF THE INTERVIEW