Joe Gutkoski as interviewed by Dan Hall, July 22, 1984, OH#133-43. Smokejumpers Oral History Project.

DH Joe, I'd like to begin the interview by asking you when did you start smokejumping?

JG In 1950, I trained in Missoula up at Nine Mile.

DH Had you had any previous experience with the Forest Service before that?

JG Yes, I worked for the Nez Perce in fire fighting in 1949, over, out of Grangeville, Idaho.

DH So when you came to the smokejumper organization, you knew how to fight fires?

JG Yes, I had experience.

DH What made you try to, try smokejumping?

JG Oh it, I, I was uh, attracted by the adventure and the... the ingenious ways of getting around the country. I love the wild land, the undeveloped land and I loved to look at it from the air and this was one way to uh, to look at it and experience the country.

DH So had you done a lot of flying before you...?

JG No, I didn't. In fact I think the first time I was ever in an airplane, I jumped out of it.

DH What kind of facilities did they have for training back then?

JG Well uh, it was an old, reconverted CC Camp, three C camp [Civilian Conservation Corps] up at Camp Manard up out of Nine Mile just north of Nine Mile. And uh, and there was a cook house and a uh, three barracks and there were facilities for physical training, exercise and mock ups for jumping out of airplane doors and practice on let downs. If you got caught up in a tree you had to know the technique for letting yourself down out of a tree. And so there was all of that, all of those training facilities up there at Camp Manard.

DH How many guys trained with you that year?

JG I would guess we had about... 65 new jumpers that year.

DH How many of those guys washed out?

JG Oh, there might have been, very few, there might have been three or four. Some of them I think went home right away and I'm not counting them. Those that stayed for the training, why they were, I don't think there were any more than three or four.
DH Were most of these guys ex-service men?

JG In 1950 there were a lot of ex-service men. I was, I'm an ex-service man, I was discharged from the Navy in '46 and there was a lot, a lot of those 65, 70 people that took training with me that were veterans.

DH Do feel that the name "shock tower" is a descriptive term?

JG The shock tower, I believe you're referring to that elevated two story platform where you would simulate a parachute opening after you left the door. I think we used to call it shock tower, it might, the term is fairly descriptive.

DH Does it simulate, very well, that shock you get when the chute opens up?

JG Uh, not really. The shock, when the chute opens up can be very hard, very... see, today with the deployment bag, why the chute deploys out very slowly although it takes more time and there's hardly any shock to it at all. Back there, the shock you get depends on your position after you leave the door of the airplane and a number of other factors and sometime, sometimes it would be fairly soft. Usually it was very hard, much harder than the shock tower would simulate. The shock tower would simulate a, a complete vertical drop and the end of a flexible nylon or we first started with a hemp rope and there was some flexibility in there and it would give you that simulated shock. But it was pretty good. It taught you reflex action. As soon as you hit, you felt the shock, you looked up, straight up and checked your canopy and lifted both arms and grabbed on to your risers. And that was the value, the reflex action developed in the jumper of looking up into his canopy to see that there were no lines over and there were malfunctioning and that is was fully developed canopy, it was very important.

DH How well do you remember your first training jump?

JG It was out of the Ford Trimotor, I remember it very well and I was very happy with myself that everything went well.

DH How did you feel as you were standing there at the door waiting for the signal from the spotter?

JG Well I knew I would jump come hell or high water whether [laughs] I had a parachute on my back or not. And the conditioning is such that very few people don't jump and later on when I became a squad leader and a foreman why some, some of the guys would ask me if they did freeze in the door for me to push them. I've pushed a few that needed a little help because bringing a jumper back is a very humiliating thing, that wouldn't, won't jump and I'd, I never wanted to do that because I've seen a few people do that and they leave the project. They pack up their belongings and they leave the project and I'm sure it affects them the rest of their life.
So something... I don't want to use the word courage but a set of mind like that usually depends on how, how tired or exhausted the individual is. Some individuals are brave as lions at one point and two days later would, would be, do the most cowardly thing and run away. And so I feel that aggressiveness and courage in men is that way. Sometimes when you're rested, you feel good, why you would do a lot of things that required aggressiveness and push. Other times when you're tired, you've been doing a lot of jumping, I've seen a lot of guys go down town and get a hotel room and go to sleep for two days and nobody knew where they were cause they were that exhausted. So it depends on, on that I think, so if a fellow asked me to push him out, why I would because I knew that bringing them back in total humiliation, they have to leave and the thing, in their own mind, would follow them the rest of their life. I felt it was worth giving them a little shove and I did a time or two.

DH Did anybody ever give you a hard time about giving these guys a little shove out the door?

JG No, it was strictly between the jumper and I. I never discussed it with anybody else and if they stayed in the door and didn't jump, why I would shove them out. And uh, usually they'd come back and thank me later and nothing was said to anybody. At least that'd the way I handled it.

DH Do you remember your first fire jump?

JG Yes, yeah it was in the Clearwater, it was an eight man and Wally Dobbins was the squad leader. I talked to Wally last night and we talked about that jump, he remembered it, up in the upper Weitas Creek. It was uh, very interesting, it was a typical fire. It went uh, to probably five or six acres, quite large for eight men and a couple, a day and a half or so the ground crew from Clearwater came in and helped us with it and we were really, this was in 1950, I remember it very well.

DH How many jumps did you make in your first year?

JG I don't have my uh, log book with me but uh, 1950 was not too good a fire year and I probably made no more than five jumps.

DH What about throughout your career, how many jumps did you make?

JG Well they, they give out a jump pin when you reach 100 and I got that but I couldn't tell you how many jumps, it was over 100.

DH Did you get any kind of a reaction from your family when you told them you were going to be a smokejumper?

JG Well, I was born and raised in northeastern Pennsylvania, a little coal mining town named Wilksbury and of course I, I joined the military when I was seventeen and a half years old. So my family was used to me, me uh, leaving and doing things on my own.
and so it was... they had nothing to do with it.

DH Did your friends think you were crazy for getting out of a perfectly good plane and jumping down to a fire?

JG Well, most of my friends were smokejumpers themselves so, and and my friends back home, back East didn't know anything about smokejumping and so uh, with their limited knowledge I don't think they were too impressed. Soon got tired of me bragging about it you know. [laughs]

DH Were training mistakes pretty common?

JG I think the... Forest Service overhead team that uh, was in charge of my training had it down very well. They had the systematic process down very well and it wasn't until later when I worked with the smokejumpers permanently as a squad leader and then a foreman and we tried experimenting with different things like helicopters and so forth where the mistakes were made. For instance Leonard Kraut and I were the first to jump out of a helicopter without, of course not using parachutes and the helicopter was very new. This was probably in '54, I think, and the helicopter was very new to the Forest Service. And Jack Hughes was the pilot so he was the first helicopter pilot checked out in Montana. He said that he had to keep moving, he couldn't hover over terrain because a lot of it was uneven. So we started practicing jumping out of a moving helicopter while he moved along at a slow pace from about 10 or 12 feet in elevation. He said he had to keep that forward speed up to, he really didn't have to but he thought at the time he did and of course the helicopters weren't that good, you know these early helicopters. So Leonard Kraut and I were appointed to jump out of the, make a first helijump without, parachute on the ground.

So we suited up just with our padded suit and Leonard went out and hit uh, what I could see, I was in the helicopter with him. You get out on the strut, there was nothing to hold onto, you'd... and we were jumping for a side hill and uh, the elevation was about 500 feet over the canyon as we got into the door, nothing to grab onto, no safety belt, put your feet on the struts, you know and then look at the pilot and wait for his nod and he'd say go and then you went. And you were doing all this out, maybe 500 feet in elevation above the canyon, you know and then you'd come into the site and the helicopter would slow down for the jump. And off went Leonard and there was quite a bit of forward speed in the helicopter, I could see he hit awful hard and there was a lot of people on the ground in charge of this and we came around again and he was going to drop me and he gave me the nod and I hit awful hard. I think I was probably 15 feet in the air when I left the helicopter because it would depend on the nod from the pilot and in one second you know you could... and this was the first time it was ever done and uh, I must have rolled, must have rolled 30 feet with such a trajectory you know and, and at that age, both Leonard and I could take a lot of banging up you know. If we went stiff or went tense I think I would have broke every bone in my body.
So after the second jump they said shut it off, that's (laughing) it, we've got a lot of, a lot of research to do on this and so that was a good example of the mistakes. In other words, going into a new field and developing something that hadn't been done before. Soon after that I think, helicopters, helitack became a pretty standard thing. A helicopter would hover or even set down and fire fighter would get out and we were, we were experimenting with it and Jack thought he had to keep a forward speed up and so it just, fortunately it was Kraut and I that did it and I'm glad nobody else because... (laughing) But I just use that as an example of mistakes when you're going into a new field of endeavor. In fire fighting a lot of mistakes can be made. There were mistakes like a cargo dropper not hooking up parachutes, you know, not hooking up the static line to a parachute and just throwing it out and down it goes. There's been mistakes like that have accounted for loss of equipment.

DH How many years were you jumping then when you became a squad leader?

JG Let's see I started in '50, I became a squad leader in '53.

DH Was that pretty common then for guys to jump for a few years and then move up in the ranks?

JG It was then. I think, I think uh, I think there were sort of generations here in the, the people that came into the jumpers right after the war, in other words '46, a lot of the veterans got out in '46 or '47 and there were a lot of turnovers there. They'd come and they'd jump one or two years and leave. Some of them stayed on to become permanent employees. But in 1950, I think the, the job market started to get a little scarce and we had more people wanting to stay in jumping so there was a little more competition. From my generation there was a lot more, people stayed with it and... valued the job. A lot of them were students at the University that just did it for experience one or two years and they were graduated and gone, gone into. Whereas people like me, I graduated in landscape architecture in 1951 from Penn State and was working, you know, for the Nez Perce in '49 and '50. I worked in '51 and uh I liked it so much I was looking for a steady job and so I kept coming back until I did get a steady job.

DH What are the duties of the squad leader?

JG Well the squad leader handles teams of up to eight men on a fire and... he's the fire boss on fires up to eight men. Usually there's two men, four men or eight men and then it goes to sixteen. So he'd be the fire boss on a fire up to eight men category and he had all the responsibility and, and the problems of selecting the jump spot as you fly around in the airplane. Fly around, first you would come up to the fire, you would look at the fire and try to gauge in your own mind the way, which way that fire was going to go. And there's a lot of factors there, time of day and so forth, winds and so on. And so when you were
looking at that fire, you were plotting where, how you were going to fight it. This was before you jumped you see and your mind is filled with these details and there's not much uh, time to be scared, to have much fear.

Then you select it with the spotter, you selected the cargo spot and uh, that might uh, and then you selected the jump spot and the jump spot might be quite a ways from the fire. In order for safety of the men and landing and the cargo spot would have to be a safe spot to put the cargo so they wouldn't get burned but close to the fire so you wouldn't have all that added energy to carry the cargo to the fires. And so you selected the cargo spots and I want it there, and then you selected the jump spot and then the spotter did the rest. He would put out the drift and streamers or we had drift chutes at that time, they were bomb, old World War Two bomb chutes in a canister. They fell approximately the speed of a man with a 28 foot canopy and and you discussed with, you know, he'd put out maybe, he'd have to put out two or three to get it in the right spot and then you'd give him the nod OK, let's go and then you'd jump. Usually the squad leader would jump first with the... always they'd jump first with the uh, with somebody on your back, maybe top man. You'd, usually in the smokejumpers, they know who their echelon is, they know who the top man is in that plane and they know who the low man on the totem pole, and they usually line up that way.

DH All of these things that you're talking about of knowing how to, this planning the spot you want to jump and all the details you have to know, is that experience or is that knowledge that you learn through training or is that something that comes with experience?

JG I think both, I think you could learn it through training and experience and also if you're, if you're uh, a hunter or a backpacker, woodsman type, you can, when you look at a piece of terrain, you can recognize it better than somebody from the streets of New York that's looking at that same terrain no matter how cool a mind he has you know, you could appreciate it. So I think someone that's experienced, has worked in the woods and has done hunting, backpacking has maybe done some logging, other work, uh, when he looks at a piece of terrain, he can appreciate it a lot better. Know if there's rocks under those shrubs and whether the trees are very high, if your chute could collapse and then you'd fall out of the tree you know and so forth and so... But experience is the best teacher. You could do it somewhat with training.

DH When did you become a foreman?

JG In 1957 I became a foreman.

DH What does a foreman do?

JG Well a foreman is a, he's a permanent employee. A squad leader isn't necessarily a permanent employee and he works year round with the project and he, his duties are larger fires, 16
men. Usually when a foreman jumps he'll have one squad leader and
a foreman and then, or he might have two squad leaders with a 16-man crew. And he usually gets to go on bigger fires and uh, helps
with the, with the planning and training more than when he was a
squad leader. Usually a squad leader is a part time employee and
he'll come in and help with the training but he hasn't been in on
the manufacturing and repair of equipment and so forth all winter
or have the advantage of permanent detachment to the smokejumper
project.

DH Did your jumping time drop as you became a foreman?

JG That's one thing I kind of resented is that's true. They
try to hold you back for the big fires and lots of times you have
to just talk your way into it, you know. Hell, here's an eight
manner, why don't you give it to me. Here's a four man, here's
even a, you know, it's hard to get on a, [laughs] if you're a
foreman, to get on a four man fire but uh, you uh, sometimes you
have to talk because there are always, of course their
instructions, the top management's instructions are to hold, hold
the foremen for bigger fires you know. Where even you might have
to take a bunch of ground people in by truck or something, be the
fire boss or foreman. So it's true, when you become foreman why
you get less opportunity.

DH How did you feel when you heard in 1949 about the Mann Gulch
Fire?

JG I was over in Idaho working with, fire fighting and '49 was
a pretty stiff year so we fought fire pretty much the whole
summer over there out of Grangeville. And... I felt that fire
fighting, I knew it was a dangerous occupation. That year we had
some very high winds, awful big fires and I appreciate the fact
that it was... fire fighting was dangerous, working steep terrain
and hot, dry, windy weather and you had to be very, very careful
and... I felt about it but I don't think it affected me very
much.

DH Did you think about that when you were fighting fires?

JG Never.

DH Do you think that it effected the organization? Did they
learn a lesson from that?

JG I think so, but it took quite awhile. There was an
investigation and so forth and there were some hard feelings on
the part of some... Forest Service, especially Forest Service
people that had boys that died in that fire.

DH Mmm mmm.

JG And I knew Wag Dodge and he was a, he was a, after that he
was a very tragic character. He died, I think of leukemia or one
of those cancerous type diseases. And I think uh, it was an
excruciating experience for him going around and finding those men. And this type of cancer they think is brought on by uh, trauma like that and he's, when I first met Wag in 1950 till he died... he was a tragic figure. And I felt sorry for him and in my little way I couldn't help a man out like that at all in my lowly status but I tried as best I could. I always felt sorry for him and felt he was a very tragic figure because this, I think that did kill him, that's what killed him.

DH Did you feel that the proceedings and the investigation dragged on too long, that maybe they should have just looked at it, forgotten about it and gotten it over with?

JG Well, there was some, there was some bad blood because of, one of the... fellows that dies, his father was a career Forest Service employee, retired. And one thing about the Forest Service that I've noticed is when you have a fatality... they, they feel, they feel that it's a resolved about, a screw up and somebody screwed up. And that's a historic bent, mind-set of the Forest Service and that's not altogether necessarily so. Conditions can sometimes... evolve that you have no control over and you really didn't screw up, you were just victim of. When you, when you talk about humidity, wind and temperature and steep, uneven terrain, those combinations are just very dynamic. There's lots of times you don't have control over it. But the Forest Service since I've ever been... known, every time there's a fatality, they always look for whose fault you see.

DH Mmm mmm.

JG And sometimes it is somebody's fault. It is a stupid screw up and usually it isn't. It's a consequence of circumstances that nobody had any control of. Of course you can always look back and say hey, if I did this and did this.

DH Yeah.

JG But I've seen quite a few fatalities in the Forest Service and not jumping fatalities but the type of things that it seems the Forest Service always tries to find the screw up and the scape goat and sometimes hang it on the man in the lowest echelon.

DH Mmm mmm.

JG Don't kick up that blame upstairs see cause it disturbs careers. [laughs]

DH How would you characterize the safety record of the smokejumper organization?

JG I think the safety record is excellent and that is mostly due to the men they hire. These men are conditioned to look out after themselves and other people and I think that's the only reason. I've been associated quite a bit with pick-up fire
fighters and ground fire fighters that were career Forest Service people, taking them into the woods and run into a saw or, you know, get... fall and hurt themselves and so forth. And that type of accident and... it's not very common in jumpers and so I attribute their safety record to the people they hire.

DH Is it more common to get hurt in the jump itself or on fighting the fire?

JG I think so although the injuries on the jump itself are few and minimal, very minimal. Some leg injuries and so forth unless uh, you know, unless you have the misfortune to hang up in a tall tree and then when you, your air, you lose the air in your canopy then your full weight is on the tree and whatever limbs they, or the top that the canopy has draped over. Then there's the possibility of the top of that tree breaking out. You're in the dry season where the... the fluids in the tree are uh, less than they would be in June and the tree would break out then you'd fall to the ground and I've seen a number of people get hurt that way. And uh, but basically I think you're, you're correct there. There are more injuries... due to jumping than there are actually fire fighting because in fire fighting you could uh, watch your men and keep track, the foreman or the squad leader could keep track of his men. Keep them spaced out, keep them from hurting each other, being careful about felling trees and so forth or falling trees due to the fire and uh, you had more control over your men. Whereas with each individual, when they jump, they're alone and they're responsible for their safety and you can't guide them, you know. You can holler at them as they're coming down you know. Turn or something, you know, turn into the wind or come this way but your control over a, over a group of men is minimal when he's in the air. So it's, so that's why I say that there probably are more injuries with the act of jumping itself than with fighting the fire. Although sometimes the injuries fighting the fire could be drastic with trees falling.

DH Did you ever get hurt during your career?

JG No, I, I... think the worst hurt I ever had was I was limped up a little bit down in New Mexico with my right heel. I come down on a rock with my right heel and that bothered me for a couple of weeks. I uh, I don't think I even made an accident report, I kind of... didn't think it was worth. But uh, to my knowledge, no, no that's right, in... in, I think in '56 I injured my ankle. Yeah, in '56 I injured my ankle on a jump down on the, on the Cut Off Mountain just north of Yellowstone Park and that uh, I became the cook and the radio man on that fire so I couldn't get on the line you know. So, these were, that was a sprained ankle and that's all the injuries I have ever had.

DH How many different bases did you jump at?

JG Starting here in Missoula, then we'd go down to Cave Junction and help out there. Jumped out of Demming, New Mexico, we used to set up the jumper project the uh, first of May down in Demming,
New Mexico, which is only 60 miles from the Mexican border.

DH    Mmm mmm.

JG    And it was very interesting you know, we occupied an old World War Two Air Force, Air Corp base and there wasn't a tree in sight, [laughs] it was all desert. And people couldn't understand how forest fire fighters [laughing] could be based in a place like that. Afterward they moved over to Silver City and set up a regular, legitimate... but we used to take all of our equipment with us and we'd set up a base at uh, in the early '50s, down in Demming and jump. So that was Missoula, Demming, Cave Junction, Redding, we'd go down and help out at Redding... let's see what else? McCall, go down and help on McCall so it was, it was strictly on a uh, outside in, outside of, of Demming and Missoula which were sort of permanent or semi-permanent bases. These other assignments were strictly help things during a fire bust and then come back to Missoula, Grangeville and so forth.

DH    How would you compare the base here at Missoula to any of the other bases?

JG    It's excellent, it's, I'm just proud of it when I see it today. It's so well done, the landscaping and buildings and the equipment is so much better than when I first started, so much safer. And the... the airplanes, course I thought, I had a lot of confidence in our airplanes, the old Ford Trimotor and Travelaires, you know, Twin Beeches and C-47s, I guess that's a DC-3, I had a lot of confidence in those. But... but when I see it now, it's a, it's a excellent outfit! The equipment is excellent, the facilities, the men look great. I really think that uh, it's a vast improvement from when I first contacted them.

DH    Is there a lot of rivalry between guys at other bases?

JG    Yeah, in, the rivalry that I experienced, and it was pretty tough rivalry, and that is, when we would go down, say to Cave Junction to help them out and they'd put us on the bottom of the jump list and project their own men at the top. I always felt that when you uh, invited a team in to help you out, you should treat them equally with your own people and spaced them out. But I've experienced some frustrating experiences down there with sitting around waiting for a jump while they jumped their own people and we were at the bottom of the list. But then, so there was a lot of, there could be hard feelings and rivalry there but outside of... other types of rivalry, no. There were very good uh, very good terms and acquaintances and you valued the friendships and so forth. But that was one, like where, when you, the individual jumper that came down to help out would feel he was cheated, you know. You might go down to Cave Junction and jump once whereas if he was integrated into the jump list, he could have jumped three times you know.
DH Do you feel that there was a point of pride that a jumper from another base had to prove to these guys that hey, our base is just as tough as yours and we can fight fires just as well if not better?

JG I never felt that because I always had a lot of respect for McCall jumpers and Cave Junction jumpers and so forth and Winthrop and I never personally felt that. There might have been some, I couldn't say but just speaking personally, I never felt that. I felt that they were excellent people you know. The only resentment I had was, was not treating us fairly on the jump list. [laughs]

DH How many times do they go through the jump list in a season?

JG Well, it depends on the... on the, of course the fire season, you know. We used to stretch out a fire, you know, there were some fire seasons I've got as many as 16, 18 jumps. Starting in New Mexico, coming up, back up in July to Missoula and then maybe in September going down to California and uh, so we stretched out a jumping season sometimes into five or six months which was very good as far as I was concerned.

DH Did you ever have any kind of a, mechanical difficulties with planes while you were going out to make a jump?

JG Just one and we, I was going, I was down in Demming, New Mexico, and we had this uh, old uh, they sent, we had a Noorduyn-Norseman with us from Cave Junction and he was our permanent plane while we were down there in May. And they sent another one cause we had a stiff, pretty stiff... fire bust and I was taking this plane out, early in the morning, the crack of dawn with a load of hay. We dropped the hay down through a hole in the floor in this Noorduyn and it, the Noorduyn didn't look too good to me. It was pretty decrepit and we got out there on the runway and usually the pilot revved up the engines and checked all the, all of the oil pressures and so forth. And he'd do this usually two, or maybe even three times depending on how confident he was with the airplane. And he revved it up the second time you know and everything showed good. And I had been dropping hay before so I knew the terrain we were running over at the mouth of the Gila River Canyon which is very steep and very rocky, absolutely no level spots and completely rock and steep. We had to fly over that terrain to get to the fire and he, something made him rev up the engine the third time and the goddamn oil pressure just went to zero. In other words the engines practically seized and if that would have happened 20 minutes later, it would... [laughs]. But that's the only mechanical failure that I've ever experienced with a, with a... airplane. I have had some malfunctions with parachutes you know, then used my reserve chute and so forth.

DH How many times did that happen?

JG Oh, just a couple of times, not very, very, very few times. It uh, I think actually uh, only two times I've had to just
deploy my reserve chute and fortunately both times I hung up in trees, I was coming in a little fast, hung up in trees, everything just turned out fine.

DH What happens when a chute malfunctions?

JG Well there's usually lines over the, what they call the uh, the load lines, go over the top. When a chute comes out, not so much now with deployment bags, everything just gets deployed so nice and there's no, not much opening shock, but back then the cover was torn off the, the... the backpack and the chute came out and it just opened very suddenly and you could have, the chute would sort of flex and breath you know and during that time, possibly lines could go over and make what they call a Mae West, break the canopy in two lobes. There wasn't enough air to really sustain you. It slowed you up good, you know, and so you had to, when you, when you cracked your emergency chute, you had to feed it out, throw it out. Because if you didn't, if you weren't really on the ball, the emergency chute could just go curling up around your, your main canopy and it wouldn't do you any good.

DH Mmm mmm.

JG Or go under your legs, you know, and come up the back and you're screwed you know. So you had to be very careful, pull your rip cord on the chest pack and you, that would take the cover off and then you grabbed the whole bundle and then you threw it out like that, kind of helped it, fed it out and uh, cause a lot of things [laughs] can go wrong with that emergency chute. You had to be very careful.

DH How would you characterize the pilots that flew those planes back in the '50s?

JG Oh, I had absolute confidence in those pilots. Uh, Ed Thorsrud was one of the great... C-47 pilots, just great. Uh, Warren Ellison, Penn Stohr was later killed... Jack Hughes and of course Bob Johnson, just absolute confidence in those people. Some of the, some of them you had to uh, like in dropping cargo, you had to talk to them good because the older you get the scareder you get. The more harder you work, the scareder you get. The more you fly, the scareder you get.

DH Mmm mmm.

JG Pretty soon they tried to drop cargo you know, way high and you had to say hey, that's no good. I'm not going to throw this cargo out, you're going to, let's do it this way, you're going to get down there 200, 300 feet and so forth. But I had, I think I had just a lot of confidence in those pilots.

END OF SIDE A

SIDE B
DH How did you feel about having to do project work?

JG I had a certain amount of resentment toward project work. I was on the payroll to fight fire and to jump and that's what I thought my job was. And I did it and I knew the reputation of the outfit depended on it because there were many detractors in the region that, that... really resented money going from the districts to the parachute project. And that's what it actually was, money that didn't get on the district for district major zone. And the Forest Service is made up of, Region 1 is made up, well the whole Forest Service made up of a number of regions, you know, ten regions and Region 1 is made up of about 16 forests, at least it used to be 16, 18 forests, they consolidated some. And each forest is made up of uh, five or six ranger districts and each are little empires ruled by an emperor looking out after his own empire. And so, when you take money from each of those enemies and put it, lump into a centralized thing like the smokejumpers that need that support, why you get resentment. And so there's a lot of detractors out there. So I knew when I did project work, I had to be very polite, very careful with the district and the forest, forest people and uh, the... not to be a braggart and to be a, you know, just an ordinary asshole like most young men are.

DH Mmm mmm.

JG And uh, because I felt that we needed the good... good graces of those people and uh, because if, they might not even use you. I knew rangers that would only use jumpers when they were completely way over their head in trouble and you'd never get an easy one from them. They were all tough ones, you know, and I knew that we had to treat those people right if we were going to be recognized and used by them because they could get together and ruin the outfit, choke you out.

DH How do you feel about guys who go into smokejumping as a career rather than the college kids who use it as a summer job?

JG Well, I think both are necessary. You need a crew of people for that long term experience and the, so forth. And you need the short term people, college students and people that are just in it for a year or two or three... for that... for that uh, turnover. The Forest Service doesn't have very much money to hold up a lot of people on, year 'round so they, they just have a skeletal force year 'round and they depend on these, on these uh, people to come back... just temporary. So I think both are necessary. The people that stay, you know, like myself, I made... I made quite a career out of it until I left and went into landscape architecture with the Forest Service. I used to, see I retired two years ago from the Forest Service after 32 years and, and I was 55 so I retired. And so... I could have been considered that type of career type person cause I stayed with it for 13 years. So you know, and... but also, both type people are necessary.
DH How do you feel about the Forest Service using private contractors to fly smokejumpers?

JG I think that's a good idea. Now... I wouldn't want to see the Forest Service have their own air force. I think, of course Johnson's Flying Service with Bob Johnson at the core of it was excellent uh, service! And he had all the planes there and you dealt with one contractor and you could influence them and say hey, I want this plane instead of that plane and so forth and so on. He'd make sure he had uh, the engines were up for uh, rebuilding you know and so forth and the hours and so forth. But now days I guess they deal with many different contractors and I think it's probably more expensive and more difficult and so forth. I don't know too much about it. I couldn't comment today what, what they're doing. But I know when we just dealt with one contractor, Bob Johnson and depended on all uh, on him for all of our services as far as flying, it was, was easy on taxpayers and it was safe and we got, the job was completed, well completed.

DH Were there any other services that the Forest Service contracted for?

JG Oh yeah, the Forest Service does a lot of flying, observe with the patrol, observing for forest fires, transporting executives here and there and flying equipment in, not necessarily equipment that is concerned with fire fighting. I know we used to go down to Jackson Hole and help the Park Service and the Teton Forest, drop the uh, things in the snow like a bridge uh, pre-cut bridge timbers and so forth. When the snow would melt, the crew would go in and build a bridge. We'd free fall them into the snow and stuff like that.

DH What about other than flying?

JG Uh, contracting services?

DH Yeah.

JG I think there's a good opportunity to save the taxpayers money to contract services uh, Forest Service to contract services.

DH What about the packers that are used to pack, to go in and get the gear? Are they under contract with the Forest Service?

JG Uh, well when I knew it, they were Forest Service employees using Forest Service stock, mules and horses. They might be some of it contracted today you know, I'm not sure. What I knew, we had a big Remount uh, depot up there at Nine Mile where these matched pack strings, all grey mules you know, Percheron mules and, or all palomino mules you know, they looked beautiful and, of course, my generation saw the end to that.

DH Mmm mmm.
JG So I couldn't comment on that too well because uh, my experience was with Forest Service employees using Forest Service pack stock.

DH How did you feel, at a later date when the Forest Service decided to let women into the smokejumping organization?

JG I, when I first heard about it I felt real good about it because I have all ready experienced some women on the fire line as ground fire fighters and they did well and... they just kept up very well. Now that uh, woman that was introduced last night at the festivities, she was a woman smokejumper and I felt good about it. I thought that they would lend a stabilizing influence and... and it'd be a plus in the end for the parachute project to allow women. I don't know how many women are jumping today, do you know?

DH I don't have any idea.

JG That one woman was introduced, she looked very capable physically to me.

DH Do agree or disagree with the statement that smokejumpers work hard and play hard?

JG Yeah, I think that's pretty true. They're... you know, a lot of smokejumpers have made a lot of mistakes playing too hard, [laughs], with injuring themselves and uh, possibly others and uh, going... following the law and the rule you know. There is a certain amount of truth to that.

DH Do you think that that ever affects the performance of a smokejumper the next day at work when he's... ?

JG Oh, absolutely. I uh, we were on a rescue mission one time and I won't mention the fellow's name, he's a powerful man. But he just smoked and drank and really caroused, you know, all the time. And when you're on a rescue mission trying to take a guy out on that wheeled stretcher, it's hard work. There's a system of changing around the stretcher you know so you wouldn't carry everything on your right arm, you'd be on the other side of the stretcher in a half hour with your left hand and you'd be up in front and back and so forth you know. There's a regular system and you kind of go as fast as you can. And old Bill was a good jumper and so forth but he, he abused [laughs], himself by smoking and drinking and staying out late and he was, he was absolutely exhausted. You could hear him a half a mile away breathing but he wouldn't let go of that stretcher and he did his, he held up his end of it. I thought he was going to fall down and die. [laughs] You could hear him gasping for air [laughs] but he never missed a step. So, sure it does affect them, their performance. [laughing]

DH What would the smokejumpers do with their free time after the fire season was over?
JG  Well the... I always went south, go down to Mexico, we spent one winter in Mexico City, one winter in Miami, went down and worked in Los Angeles one winter. Sort of go down to the warmer climates and come back right in the early, in the first of May, you know, and try to get on that [laughing] New Mexico season.

DH  What do you see the future of smokejumpers being?

JG  Well I, I see smokejumpers being used as crack fire fighters, even close to roads you know, and I see that continuing even though the region is getting roaded up more and there's less back country for that, you know. Smokejumpers were originally designed for fighting fires in the back country. I see them used more and more as, on fires that need uh, immediate attention and uh, and... the specimens that you have, physically they're very good. They can be depended on to fight, work hard and fight fire. Fighting fire, the way I did it, the way most of us did it, was done at night. The fire would calm down, that was the most effective time to work and when the fire was rolling at uh, 2:00 or 3:00 p.m. in the day, why... you have to watch yourself that uh, you didn't do a lot of work that would just be... once you lose fire line, it just take the heart out of a crew. So working at night, fire burn up to the line and stop and go out. And so uh, you, these physical specimens have to be capable of working all night you know, they are. They have a certain espirit de corp and they can be depended on. So... I see a future in smokejumper activity, still using smoke, using airplanes, parachutes, also helicopters, helitack. I see a real good future for it. Especially with more people and being the cause of man caused fires and so forth.

DH  Mmm mmm.

JG  I don't see any fazing out or a great changing of, you know, they had their time and their gone. I think there, there's going to be a lot of use for them in the future.

DH  Will the number of bases and the number of jumpers drop?

JG  It's possible that a lot of consolidating will take place in order to save dollars. Especially with the planes they have today you know, they're very fast.

DH  Mmm mmm.

JG  And having them in... localized areas may not, from an economic standpoint, may not be too good you know. So there, there might be a lot of consolidation and working out of central areas.

DH  Do you suppose Missoula will become one of those bases they close for consolidation?

JG  Never, never, Missoula will always be a main base because of it's geographical location. West all the way over to the valleys
in Eastern Washington that break up the forest, all the way over to the Rocky Mountain front where the prairie starts, it's centralized. If you talk about Eastern Washington, Idaho, Northern Idaho and Montana, I see Missoula will always be a key location.

DH Do you feel that your experiences as a smokejumper affected you as you, after you left the organization?

JG Oh absolutely. Smokejumping... the smokejumper project meant a lot to a lot of young men. They, here's where they found themselves. They found that they could be useful and to have productive lives and... and guided them to a productive future. Whether they stayed with it or just came for a year or two or three it... I think uh, overall it's a real plus and it, it had a positive affect on a young man that came through. I know it did me. But I... I have the jumper organization to thank for any, any productive life that I've had.

DH Well I think I've exhausted my list of questions. Is there anything that you feel I've missed or something that you want to add?

JG Well, I think I'm a good example of a person starting with jumping but then leaving and going on with the forest by still remaining in the Forest Service. Going on with a profession which I was trained for, landscape architecture and... and finished out a career of 32 years. The jumper organization got me going and it gave me some priority, job priorities so that when I did leave it, why I was able to, to have that transition and have a certain amount of priority over other people that were just starting out green. And so I think, I think in that way uh, it's happening more and more in the smokejumpers I think. They go into a forestry or engineering or landscape architecture or what have you, stay in the Forest Service, becoming useful people.

DH Well, I want to say thanks for the interview.

JG Well thank you and it was a pleasure.

END OF THE INTERVIEW