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Can you tell me your name and what years you jumped?

Okay. Do you have, do you recall much from your rookie year and training?
Well, not too much. We trained here at Inner City, [Winthrop, WA].

Anything happen particularly during your training or what was the part you liked the best and liked the least?
Well, I 'spose the part I liked the best was the jumping, uh the part I liked the least probably was the conditioning that we went through, the hikes with the full gear. We'd hike up on the hill back here, then when we'd make our practice jumps up above Pearrygin Lake, why we'd hike back.

Do you remember your first jump?
Yeah, the first fire jump, I don't really remember the first practice jump. The first fire jump was over at the head of Lake Chelan and it was the first jump for me and my partner Boles and that was in rocky terrain, real rough area and then we were relieved by a ground crew in a couple days and then we hiked out of there.

Nothing significant?
No.

Any, did you ever tree up or have any...?
We uh, treed up in that first fire and we had a hard time gettin' our chutes out. And we probably made the biggest blunder that one can make and that's not retrieving our chutes and we kind of got in a little bit of trouble over that. So we never did that again. The ground crew got our chutes out and brought 'em back. That was a no-no.

Yeah.

Uh, that's about it.

How 'bout the next year, did you ever do a rescue jump?
No, I never did a rescue jump.

How did you get into jumping in the first place?
Well, I s'pose the main reason was because my dad jumped in 1940 and he was one of the first ones to do it. So that was kind of an interest and then I was raised here in Winthrop and was familiar with the smokejumping base and a lot of the people because my dad worked for the Forest Service, retired from the Forest Service. So I s'pose that was the main reason and then I needed a summer job, too.

What did you like best about it?

Oh, I think the best thing about it that I liked was that you never really knew what you were going to be doing from one day to the next. Uh, you may be here working on a district or puttin' up hay or you may be in California or Idaho or anyplace. That's what I really liked about it at the time.

Did you like the jumping itself?

Oh yeah.

Better than the pack outs?

Yeah, a lot better.

Um, let's see, were you ever on a jump when someone had a malfunction or a problem?

Yeah... was up Bicycle Creek above Wenatchee, Leavenworth, up in there. There was a, let's see, my partner and I jumped first and we landed on the ground safely and then they were going to jump two more jumpers out, Melvin Northcott and Mike Bowman, you probably know Mike Bowman.

Mike Bowman, sure.

And so they came out, we were already on the ground and we were watching them come down. And I don't know who jumped first, but the one that came out second came out too close and got on top of the other one's chute and he lost his air then and he went through the bottom guy's chute and tangled up in the cords. So the one guy's chute had collapsed underneath him and they were comin' down on one chute and they were really sailing.

They had, they were connected?

Yeah, they were tangled together on the one chute and we were yelling at 'em from the ground to pull their reserve, of course they couldn't hear us. But after they went out of sight, why either Mike or Melvin pulled their reserve chute and it did just catch enough air and it hung 'em, one chute hung in one tree, one chute hung in another tree and they were just off the ground.

Ah, that's incredible.
RH So they weren't injured, but we thought there was gonna be some injuries on that one. They were a little scared.

KM I bet.

RH But other than that, and that's about the only injury or incident that I can recall.

KM No other injury?

RH No.

KM That's good. Um, let's see here, what was the fire season like in '54?

RH '55 and '56. Boy, that's a long time ago. Uh, I think that was the year... one year, either '55 or '56, they had a big break in Northern California, and they sent a lot of us down to Redding, to jump out of Redding. Uh, we went to Cave Junction, first, I guess it was. Uh, boy, I can't really recall, either we were gonna fly to Redding and the smoke was so bad from so many fires that we either landed at Cave Junction or we went to Cave Junction on purpose, I'm not really sure. But anyhow, when we got to Cave Junction, we couldn't get out because the smoke was so bad from all the fires. I mean it was, a lot of fires around the country. So we finally got out and went to Redding and uh, a bunch from Missoula came in, too. I don't know how many jumpers there were there, but a mass of 'em and we'd go out and I remember we flew out over the mountains there out of Eureka and you could just count fires out the window, as many as you wanted, seemed like.

They finally did jump us, jump us on a fire and the spotters were so confused and everybody else was that by the time we got on the fire there was already equipment and ground crews in there, so we really didn't do any good. We hiked back out and tried it again, but they didn't know where anybody was, really, whether there was ground crew there or whether there was nobody on the fire. That was the biggest fire bust that I'd ever seen. Uh, I don't really remember either how many jumps we made down there, but it was three or four I suppose.

KM Wow. Um, let's see. Was your rookie classes that, do you remember much about your training or the people in it? Did they stick around?

RH Uh, well, I really don't know. I jumped in '55, my first year and then '56 and then I went to California, so I lost touch really, who jumped after that. But most everybody that jumped in my rookie class of '55, jumped again in '56. I remember that, but other than that, I don't know. Uh, as far as the training, I don't know. I really didn't get to associate with a lot of the jumpers like the other guys did because I didn't live on the base, I lived at home. So I'd come to work and put in the work schedule and then I'd go on home. So I didn't really get the comradeship that a lot of guys did by staying right on the base.
Uh, so I don't really remember a lot of guys too well.

KM Yeah. What kind of chutes were you jumping then?

RH They were about thirty feet, I think, but a circular chute with two slots in the back, but I don't know what the name was.

KM Yeah, okay.

RH Uh, they seemed to me to be easy to control, but I don't think they're anything like what they are now, from what I've seen.

KM Any other stories that you can remember?

RH Not really.

KM Were you a fire fighter before you started jumping?

RH No, it's the first experience I've had. Then the requirements weren't as strict as to who could become a smoke jumper. Recently, my son tried to get on. I thought that would be kind of nice. We'd have three generations, I don't know whether that has happened or not, but the requirements were so strict and he didn't have any Forest Service experience, he didn't have any fire fighting experience, so, but then, you know, if you needed a job and they thought you could handle the job, why you got hired.

KM Have any regrets?

RH No, no. Maybe, I don't know, I might regret that I didn't get to do it another year or two, maybe, but other than that, I have no regrets. I enjoyed it. After the fact, I enjoyed it. We never seemed to enjoy hiking out after the fire, but after a day's rest, we were ready to go again.

KM What was your longest pack out?

RH It was out of the Imnaha, down on the Oregon, Washington border someplace. I don't know whether it was in Washington or Oregon, but it was about twenty miles.

KM Really? With about how much weight?

RH Oh, around 100 pounds, I s'pose.

KM That's quite a hike.

RH Yeah, one time we jumped, the first year, into, just on the edge of Hell's Canyon, only we were down, the fire was about half way down it seemed like and then we had on the Oregon side it was a little more rolling than on the Idaho side, it was pretty bluffly. Uh, the fire was quite a ways down there and that was a tough hike out, it wasn't as far, but it was steep.
KM  Up?

RH  There was no way to go down, must come back up... You got anything else? [laughter]

KM  Well, let's see here. Did you see any major changes between '56, I mean '55 and '56, anything that, probably not much change in that time?

RH  No, I think they may have changed, they may have made a change in the aircraft. In '55, we were doing most of our jumping out of a Noorduyn, um, and I think in '56 they brought in a couple Twin Beeches.

KM  Oh really.

RH  So, it must have been in '56 we jumped out of a C-47 once, too. I don't remember when or what the occasion was, but it must have been a big fire break someplace because they didn't use those here unless they had a big fire break for some reason or other. Usually, it was just a Noorduyn or the Twin Beech. But other than that...

KM  How about any stories about after the fire, getting out or, ever run across bears or that kind of thing?

RH  Yeah, I think so. There are some bear stories someplace in there, but I can't really remember. Either, either my partner or I jumped and hung up in a tree and there was a bear down below, but of course it took off when it discovered somebody was around.

KM  Good thing you were in the tree.

RH  Yeah, it worked out pretty good, it seemed like it was him, my jump partner, and I don't even remember which one it was. Uh, coming out, I don't...

KM  No wild times in a small town?

RH  No, not really. We always enjoyed our trips to Enterprise, [Oregon], we'd send jumpers down there most every summer, I think we'd just go down there in anticipation of a storm or something, but no real wild times, I was too young. [laughter]

KM  How old were you when you started jumping?

RH  Eighteen.

KM  Eighteen.

RH  Eighteen and nineteen I jumped. We did, they were shootin' a movie in Enterprise there, one time, and we were all excited that maybe we'd get to see some movie stars. Jeff Chandler and Dorothy Malone were making Pillars in the Sky, I think it was, but nothing came of that.
Um, let's see, I'm running out of questions here. You never had any, come across any problems in a plane or engines blown, no emergency exits?

No.

Were you doing two-man sticks then, two or three-man sticks?

Doing what?

Three man sticks, three people out of the door at the same time?

Oh no, just two.

Just two.

What'd you call that?

Sticks.

Sticks?

I guess I didn't say that. You were never injured in a jump?

No, no, I got the wind knocked out of me, I think, once.

From a landing?

And a bloody nose, yeah. I was back up towards Ross Lake and they jumped quite a few of us in there. I think there was some Missoula guys jumped on that with us, they evidently had a big fire break and pulled in. And we were gonna land on a hillside in a little opening and I was going down with the slope and a gust of wind caught me and threw me back into the ground backwards so just my heels and the back of my head hit the ground, and it jarred me a little bit, but nothing serious. That's the worst thing that ever happened to me.

That's good.

Yeah, I think it was.

Some people had some rough times. Um, let's see. That's all I've got if you have any other, anything else, any other stories from back then that may not have happened to you, someone else? Ever run out of water, food?

No, I can't think of a thing.

Twenty mile pack out, that's pretty tough. Okay, well that's great, thanks very much.

END OF TAPE