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Oral History Interview with David B. Kauffman, M. D.
August 16, 1984, Whitefish, MT. Smokejumpers Oral History Project, OH# 133-54.

JN Well, Dave, I wanted to ask you first of all, what were you doing before you got involved in smokejumping?

DK Before I became involved in smokejumping I was a logger and a sawmill worker and then I started working for the Forest Service in 1943. I was a packer at Big Prairie Ranger Station, which is in the Bob Marshall Wilderness, and it's there I learned to know some of the first conscientious objectors, smokejumpers. 1943 being the first year that conscientious objectors jumped for the Forest Service.

JN So you were packing in supplies to bases? Is that what you were doing?

DK Yes, I was what was known as the second string packer at Big Prairie. My job was to take supplies... generally to take supplies from the Ranger Station to the various side camps, to the lookout camps. It was there, I was at Basin Creek for approximately three weeks packing sand and gravel with a packstring onto the landing field at Basin Creek where the conscientious objectors were working making a 'T' and a circle on the center of the... the 't' at one end and the circle on the center at the other end. And my job was to pack sand and gravel so that they could mix up cement by hand... mix up concrete by hand. I don't remember exactly how many of the guys were up at Basin Creek. I think there were eight or ten of them, and there was a couple of them down at the Ranger Station.

Then I had to... during the summer, it was not a very bad summer as far as fires are concerned. I think we only had two or three fires in our area and I had to go and pack the smokejumpers and their equipment... go get them and bring them out after they had jumped and put out the fire.

JN Basin Creek is in the Bob Marshall?

DK Basin Creek is in the Bob Marshall, upriver, about eleven miles above Big Prairie Ranger Station. Big Prairie Ranger Station is the farthest in of any ranger stations in the Bob Marshall Wilderness.

JN Had you heard about smokejumping before your contact with the conscientious objector jumpers?

DK Only in a very minute way. We had heard... since I was working in the woods and had fought fire prior to this on several occasions, I had fought fire just as a volunteer to the Forest Service. We had heard they were starting in Missoula. I don't remember when that started. I know some of the men who started it, Earl Cooley, Art Cochran, Frank Derry, were some of the oldtimers. Wag Dodge was one of the first jumpers. They only had a few the first couple of years.
And I had just heard of it but as I was a conscientious objector and there was a camp at Belton, Montana, and we learned to know the boys up there at Belton very well. And we got acquainted with two of them who left Belton to go to Missoula, or to... they didn't go to Missoula, they went to Seeley Lake. This is where the first jumpers were trained. And so that's where I first became acquainted with it.

JN I see... and you were a conscientious objector yourself?

DK Oh, yes, I was a conscientious objector. Still am... and I spent... I spent about thirty months under the draft law of 1940, '41 as a conscientious objector.

JN If I may ask, could you give me a little bit of background in to why you chose that course.

DK Certainly, I'd be happy to. I was born and raised at Creston, and I belong to the Mennonite Church. And the Mennonite Church, for centuries, has been known as one of the three Peace Churches. The Quakers, the Brethren, and the Mennonites are the three historical Peace Churches and we have a long history. And this is... we base our stand on non-resistance out of the scriptures, partly where Christ says, "My Kingdom is not of this world, else would my servants fight?" I have no objection to working for the government, doing work of importance...

[INTERRUPTION]

JN Before we interrupted you were saying you have no objection to working for the Government?

DK That's right, I have no objection to working for the government doing work of national importance but, I did not feel I could become part of the Army or the Armed Forces in any way... where the process of taking life is the main purpose. And therefore... and since our government was very gracious in affording us with that kind of a conscience, work of national importance, I chose to do that. A lot of people don't realize it, but we... we served the government without pay from the government.

JN Without any kind of...?

DK Without any kind of renumeration from the government... ordinarily. However, in smokejumpers they gave us at that time, fifteen dollars a month for special shoes, and special clothing, for... because of the type of work we were doing... in smokejumpers. The government gave us fifteen dollars a month. Otherwise the Church, the Mennonite Church as a whole over the nation, we got five dollars a month for whatever we needed.

JN From... the five dollars came from...?

DK The Church.
The church?

From the Mennonite Church, yes.

Who... so, you did get... the government did provide you food and... food and board, and that's it, huh?

The government provided us, especially in the smokejumpers, they provided food and housing. Other CPS camps... Civilian Public Services is what it was under. If I remember correctly... mostly the Mennonite Church furnished the food, but the government furnished the housing and we lived in old CCC camps. The first year I was drafted I spent at... Downey, Idaho doing farm emergency work and work that the conservation... it was a... The old CC there had a soil conservation type of thing going on and they did a lot of work for the farmers in that area. Irrigation projects... we built the dam down there, faced the dam with rock, built a spillway faced with rock. All pretty much hand labor, not a lot of machines. I was one who got on the crew... well, I helped put in a lot of rock on that spillway and, I was also on the crew that did a lot of work with irrigation... ditches and things like that.

The summer of '44 I worked at Bancroft, Idaho, doing what they called Farm Emergency Work. I was helping to put up hay because the farmers in that area could not hire help. There was some deal worked out with the farmers whereby the conscientious objectors did farm work. We did not get paid for it. This went into... our wages went into a frozen fund. I don't know whatever happened to that frozen fund and I really don't care, you know, because this was... this was our agreement with the government and I was happy to do it.

Had the church itself worked out the agreement with the government?

Yes, yes... early, when the conscription started, when the draft... way back when the draft started in... '39? '38, '39... our Church... the Mennonite Church, the Brethren Church and the Quakers went to Washington D.C. and worked out a plan whereby we could be drafted but we could serve, you know, without pay, we were serving without pay. And that's why, like I say, the... our farm wages went into a frozen fund, and whatever happened to the frozen fund, the government and the Lord only know. [laughs] But I enjoyed my work there and from there, in the spring of '45 I applied to go to smokejumpers, I wanted to go to smokejumping.

Just out of curiosity, what made you pick smokejumping out of the... there seem to be a lot of different things that you could do.

Oh, yes there were a lot of different things we could do. There were mental hospitals, there were other Forest Service camps. I suppose, you know, I have to admit, there's a... a great deal of...
JN David, before that phone call you were just about to tell me why you choose smokejumping over the other services.

DK There was a lot of other services. Like hospital work, mental hospital work, there were other forest service camps, but smokejumping had a certain glamour to it. There was a... this was the elite of CPS, as far as I was concerned. And, I thoroughly enjoyed this country around here, being born and raised here and the smokejumpers were out of Missoula. It was a... well, it was something I wanted to do more than anything else. I wanted to be a smokejumper. Partly because of the glamour, partly because of the fame that went with it, and partly because I liked that kind of work. I thought smokejumping would be great.

JN Could you describe a little bit what your image of a smokejumper was, before you got into it?

DK Well as I knew the smokejumpers, they were just, uh... common ordinary fellows like you and I, except perhaps they had a little more pizazz about them. They liked the adventure a little more, they didn't mind doing that which was not necessarily totally safe and sane. The smokejumpers that I knew were just a real fine bunch of fellows, that I knew up there at Big Prairie. But they... they liked that kind of work.

JN The ones that you knew up at Big Prairie, were they, like yourself, conscientious objectors?

DK Oh yes, oh yes. Except for... there were two men in there, Forest Service employees, Wagner Dodge and Bill Woods [William C. Wood]... who were Forest Service employees. Wag Dodge was a leader of the group, he was... he handled, you know... and Bill Woods was his assistant. And both of them, very, very, fine people, very very fine people. I was later privileged... went out and became a smokejumper myself, I was privileged to work with both of these. I got better acquainted with Bill Woods up there. And he was just... he was born and raised in Missoula, very nice fellow. Loved to ride horses, and he'd go wrangling horses with me some mornings. As I was a packer I did a lot of the wrangling. But yeah, those conscientious objectors were just like... just like you and I. Just real good common ordinary people.

JN Were they all Church members or were there some that were not?

DK I... in thinking back, I think they were all Church members. As I think of it, there's a... they all came... not all of them. They came from the Mennonite Church, one of them was a Methodist, one of them was a Presbyterian, there was a couple of them [that] were Quakers, one of them came from the Disciples of Christ Church. I'm trying to think... I think... I don't
remember where I... where he was, but I don't believe there were any Jehovah Witnesses in there, though we had some Jehovah Witnesses in CPS and in the smokejumpers... we did have some of those in the smokejumpers.

JN I'm curious how different... people from different churches got along in the smokejumpers?

DK Excellent... excellent! Generally, excellent. As in anything you have difference in personalities and personalities rub once in a while. But for the most part... for the most part, everybody got along real well. Oh, we had our discussions, you bet, we had some real dandy theological discussions. Some would enter in and some wouldn't. Some just steered totally clear of any theological discussion and... for various reasons, you know, that was their business. Of course there are some people who, you know, there are some people, their personality... they just don't get into a lot of discussions. They go their quiet little way and do what they need to. And, others love to argue or talk about things, whatever you want to call it. But all in all... I was impressed that these fellows were, you know, real sincere about their belief. And I've known a lot of them down through the years since then and they're pretty much the same. They're pretty much the same.

We've had smokejumper reunions. Of course we've lost some of them. But, uh... they're pretty much the same, same kind of fellows... just the same today. Some of them didn't like CPS particularly well but they chose it above the Army. They were willing to serve.

JN What were the attitudes of other people that were non-CO's, non-conscientious objectors, towards you and the other church members?

DK It varied a lot. Yes, this... it varied a great deal. Over the years, the contact I had... among... and I got in contact quite often traveling with a lot of soldier boys... Marines, what have you... but I explained what I believed and why I believed... I got nothing but respect. They might not agree with me, but I got a lot of respect. Occasionally, depended on where you were at, you were looked down upon. For the most part, my experience was, that I was respected. Because I knew why I believed what I believed and they respected me for it as a person. I think that... one of the things that helped me... my father taught me to put out a day's work for a day's pay. And whenever I had a job to do, and I don't mean to sound like I'm a braggart or anything like that but when I had a job to do, I did it to the best of my ability and as if I were getting paid for it. And I think... you know this was my personal philosophy, and I think this helped a great deal because they... they didn't think I was a goof off. They respected me for what I was, how I could work, and all of this. But... they might not have agreed with me, but they respected me. That was my personal experience. I know that some places... there were some places where they did not get this kind of respect... overall during the war. But for the most
part... those who gave, you know, the best they had... were respected for it... and knew where they were coming from.

JN Could you go into those places that were... where that did not happen, that respect did not happen... do you know about that?

DK I, uh... never having experienced this, you know. I don't... I have trouble going into... [laughs] I have trouble going into this because I did not experience this type of thing. I know that some of the fellows who were... and I don't even remember the camps... that there was a camp or two when they first went there... the boys did not go to town any oftener than they had to. Nothing physical was ever done, that I know of, but the people made it very plain, they would rather not deal with them. But after they were there, after they'd proved themselves... most of them were accepted. You know, it's the good old American tradition, 'I may not agree with you, but you have a right to believe like you believe.'

You know, this is... I... I suppose there's something I appreciate about America. I may not agree with all the politicians, but the fact that as of yet... it's not too good right now sometimes, especially in medicine. The government is putting their thumb harder and harder upon medicine. And, part of it's our fault but, for the most part, we, uh... I respect... I respect my government. I will serve it, I will do for it what I can. Even if I don't agree... you know.

But, as to the places where the conscientious objectors were not accepted... and I never had that problem. My first... my first assignment I was drafted to Downey, Idaho... and that country is about 85%... or was then, [at that] time, about 85% to 90% Mormons. A lot of whose boys went into the service. And we came in, did the farm work and all that. We were still accepted. We really were! We were free to go downtown. I myself, in order to have a little extra cash, I would work after hours unloading coal in Downy or, doing a little extra farm work, or something like that... you know. And I was accepted... you know, they... they respected me. The summer I spent at Bancroft was a side camp out of Downy Idaho. The man I worked for and his son-in-law were very, very good Mormons... no problems, no problems. I had... as far as I was concerned, I had an excellent relationship with them. Because I would put out a day's work for a day's pay.

JN The Mormons generally didn't object to going into the military service then?

DK Not that I know of. Not that I know of. I don't... I really don't know a lot about the Mormon philosophy and their thoughts on war, but I know a lot of their boys...

JN Did go?

DK [PAUSE] Did go, yes. And I don't recall of ever... I just don't recall of ever seeing a Mormon boy in CPS. There may have been some [laughs].
Most of the people that you worked with in smokejumpers at that time, virtually all of them were CO's, conscientious objectors?

All of the smokejumper... well, all of the smokejumpers except the... we called them government men. The fellows who were hired by the Forest Service to direct the activities. Everybody was a conscientious objector in the smokejumpers. All of the run of the mill... well, our rank and file, were conscientious objectors, yes at that time. We had... I don't know just how many government men there were. I know that we had several who had been in the service who were discharged or whatever, who were there as government employees.

One was a... had been a Sergeant in the Marines. And I'll tell you, he trained me, he made you physically fit. I had... I had been at Downey, Idaho and then I took a few days, I think I took about a week... a week or ten days furlough. Went to Oregon, and worked in the woods, because I could make some pretty good money at that time, and I went out there and worked in the woods and then reported to camp at Nine Mile, which is close to the old CCC camp at Nine Mile. And the first evening I was there... I wish I could recall his name. I admired him because he was very honest with us. He says, "Let's go for a hike, boys. We're going on a five mile hike before supper." And we went on a hike! And I was in good shape physically. So we went on a hike for five miles, and we were about a mile and a half, two miles from the camp and he says, "OK, double-time!" And if I remember correctly there were only about three or four who were still with him. The rest were strung out. But there were three or four of us who were still with him when we reached camp.

Of course, I was very proud, of being able physically to do that, you know, and because we did, we... if you goofed off they soon knew it. You know, they soon could pick out the goof offs, who were there to goof off or whatever. Because you put out a... If you made an honest effort to go. Yeah, they were... they were from every walk of life that were in the smokejumpers. There were farmers from Kansas, there were loggers from Oregon, there were people who had been in business. I remember one fellow, young fellow, who had never done a day's work in his life as far as physical labor was concerned. He had been an office boy and this. But he tried and he became a smokejumper. And he groomed himself. He was willing to... he was willing to... to work at it, and he was a smokejumper.

How was he treated?

They put a little pressure on him to see if he'd stand up under it. I... I think I had an advantage in some ways, because I was a... I knew the Forest Service ropes, to a certain extent having worked for the Forest Service. And having been a lumberjack and a logger and all that, I had no problem that way, you know. I knew what was going on and because I knew what was going on, I got some special assignments that were a little more glamorous than the ordinary work.
When we went out to cut wood or something, why... I knew how to sling a cross cut saw and I'd pick a good partner and we would do a little better than the rank and file because we knew what we were doing. And, consequently, I got to sharpen tools and take care of tools and make sure everything was in good shape rather than to go... make hay, or do pick and shovel work, you know. I... [laughs] In a way I was sort of privileged. Not really, but they would pick and choose those who knew what they were doing, so I... I got along fine.

JN Could you go into a little more detail on... on the physical training after that... that first five mile hike?

DK Yes! I certainly could. We had... before we ever done any jumping we had two weeks of physical training. Every morning, there was calisthenics for one hour... to an hour and a half before the breakfast bell rang. We got up... the whistle blew at 5:30 [A.M.] and we were out on the ground there, doing calisthenics for at least an hour. And sometimes an hour and a half. It was rigorous. It was rigorous. Those calisthenics were good. We did a lot of deep knee bends and those were to strengthen the legs and the knees because jumping... is a... you take a beating in jumping, especially in your legs. The calisthenics we did in the morning were... generally consisted of deep knee bends, running in place, jumping jacks... what else did we do?

But then during the day we had training. Training in coming down out of a tree, like roping ourselves down. We were taught how to rope ourselves down... get loose from a chute that was hung in a tree and uh... to come down. We were taught how to jump. We jumped out and dropped and were caught by a rope. We dropped about twenty-five, thirty feet I think, and were caught by an inch... inch and a quarter rope. We were in full suit... or for... full harness and suit.

A lot of our training was learning how to fight fire. Well, I had no problem with that because I knew what the score was before I ever hit smokejumping. A lot of the boys didn't know what a shovel was. I had a friend there... can't say his right name, always called him 'Jackovitch'... Ivan... somebody. The third morning he was so stiff, we helped him get out of bed and he could barely... he could barely go through. But then it got easier, you know, as time went on. It was rigorous. They did put us through the ropes... physically. They... and we would often... he would... this same gentleman would often take us for a hike in the evening after... after our eight hours was in. I enjoyed it but I... because I had no problem with it, but there were some there who were not really particularly fond of this gentleman [laughs] because they had not been through that, but... till we were, till we did our first jumps... it was two weeks till we did our first jumps... and in two weeks you can't really take someone and put him in real good shape. But they were in a lot better shape at the end of two weeks than they were when they started.

JN How was your jump training? What kind of a set-up, in terms of towers and things like that did you have?
Ok, our jump training... first of all we had to learn what a chute was like. We had to learn how our suits were built and what they were built for. How to adjust the suits, because they were heavy canvas and they had a heavy canvas strap that buckled on the outside so that you could adjust it under your foot. And then there was a heavy web that come up into your crotch. And this was built so that... so that it would take... so that your feet could take a lot of the jar of the opening of the chute.

Then we would learn how to let ourselves down from the tree. That was, letting ourselves down with a rope. See, we carried in our jumping suits we had a big on our right leg, and in this pocket was approximately a hundred feet of rope, half inch rope. And two canvas bags to put our suit and our chute in. One held the suit and the harness. One of them held the chute. And those... those were on there. And you learned how to... they would hoist us up, they had a number of block and tackles and they would string you about twenty-five feet off the ground. And then you had to get the rope out of your pocket, run it through the chute rings, and run it through your harness and then unhook yourself... unhook yourself from the harness. Or from the chute... theoretically, unhook yourself from the chute, and then let yourself down the rope. It was quite a trick. I'm not sure I could do it right now, but I think I could.

Then during the day we had to go through certain calisthenics. One was where they strapped your knees to a pole and your toes were against a board and you bent back until you could almost touch your head on the ground, and you come up. And, it's to strengthen your stomach muscles. One of the other things was running through tires. Just like the obstacle course that the, uh... that the football players and... when they have these big contests with the movie stars or all the athletes, you know. You know, they have the... Another one was crawling through a culvert.

Another one was swinging on the ladder. You know, they had a ladder built up and you grabbed it... went hand to hand. I had trouble with that one... simply because... and I... it didn't keep me out of the jumpers but... in December of '44 I had had an appendix operation and they in... or they damaged the nerve in my right arm with a blood pressure cuff. And I didn't have a lot of strength... in my right... and you can see, I have... I still have atrophy. But I got by. I got by... because I could do all the other work and I could get by and I could do everything and I could go about three, four rungs sometimes on the ladder. My right hand would let go. [laughs] But, I explained to them and told them what, and... I said I can handle a crosscut saw. I can handle a shovel. I can handle a pulaski. And if you don't think so, you put me up against the best, and I'll work with them." So... we got... we got along famously. It was rigorous training. You went through... one day you went through parachute jumping training. The next day you went through fire fighting school. And that was to go out and learn how to dig down in tough terrain... to dig a trench where you went down to mineral earth. You learned how to... which way to put the dirt. If there's no fire close, you put it away from it. If there's a fire
close, you learned how to knock down hot spots in a fire. I think the thing... one of the things I enjoyed a lot about the smokejumpers was... typically the Forest Service feeds well, and we had excellent cooks there. And we did eat good! [laughs]

JN What kind of food would they serve?

DK Oh! We... at the... at the... right at the base camp there at Nine Mile, we had potatoes, and meat, and vegetables, fresh vegetables. Whatever you wanted, you know. The Forest Service is noted for feeding well and we had good. We had fresh meat, you know, I'm not the greatest meat eater. I just don't have to have meat to get along but, for those who did, there was fresh meat. Now, of course, I eat my share of meat but... the food was... the food is... there was fresh vegetables.

The Forest Service fed us. They fed us and they fed us well. You know... the food was good. Out on fires... now, when we got to jumping on fires, we often subsisted on K-rations or the old C-rations. We... I've eaten tons of the old C-rations.

JK Could you tell me what's in the old C-rations? What they're like?

DK I think I can! [laughs] Yeah! We would go out... you know, before we went on fires, they would take us out for a day. And when we went out for a day, they told us, "Now, you might just as well get used to C-rations for your noon meal." There was canned bread. In the old C-rations there was a loaf of canned brown bread. There was a can of meat, it was all in... mostly in tin cans because that was the way they could keep it and not have it spoil. There was some meat. There was some cheese and there was some fruit in there. That was your meal. Three times a day it gets... after the fourth or fifth day it gets a little tiresome. But, you know we... if we were on a great big fire, of course, then they... then they set up a fire camp and [inaudible] we had food. I mean they flew in and dropped in provisions or they packed in provisions, and... we ate well on big fires.

JN Did they have a camp cook, at that time?

DK Oh yes! Oh yes, they had camp cooks when they... when they jumped in, somebody would take over as camp cook. This may be ahead of your story, but I cooked on two fires. One fire was out in Idaho, and we jumped in what we thought was a Forest Service Fire but it was on Potlatch Timber. And, when we landed... there was six of us jumped, and when we landed, the fire boss come over and he says, You know you're on the wrong fire, but, he says, "Please stay and help because we need all the help we can get to contain this fire." They had, uh... I think they had twenty-one Mexicans on that fire, plus the fire boss, plus two or three other fellows. And he says, "Now, the first thing I want to know, which one of you guys can cook?" Of course we started looking at each other. None of us had had any real training in cooking, but growing up in a family of fifteen, I knew something about cooking. And I started to say I will be glad to help
somebody. But I just said, "I will be glad to..." and he says, "You're it!" And you're a cook! He says, "And this other kid," he says, "And you will help him." [laughs] So I was cook on that fire. We had twenty-six or twenty-seven people. The packstring came in every other day.

We were there on that fire five or six days and we got... for every hour we put in over eight hours we got what they called compensatory time. But, when you're cooking for twenty-seven men, you get up early in the morning so that you can get breakfast for them so they can hit that fire while it is still kind of calm. And then you have supper in the evening. And then you do dishes and you have lunches for anybody that comes through. You have to pack lunches for the guys on the fire line.

I would cook... for breakfast I would cook two hams and twelve dozen eggs and that would just disappear. They never said they wanted more... the boss... I said, "Is it enough?" And he said, "Yeah, they're doing fine." But... I spent a lot of hours in the kitchen. When I come off of that six days of... when I come off of that six days of fire, I think I had eight or nine days of comp time. I had spent that many hours in the kitchen. Which sounds incredible. But, I never got to bed before 10:30 or 11:00 at night. I was always up at about 2:30, 3:00 AM getting the fire going, getting everything going. Nobody complained.

But, we did... we had good food on a fire. Unless there was just a couple of us, and then on a small fire we ate our C-Rations or our K-Rations. Now, the K-Rations were a little more sophisticated. They were packed more in cellophane at that time, more in plastic. Biscuits, meat, fruit, fruit bars, chocolate bars... well that's why they deal with the K-rations. Or the old C-Rations... we had a chocolate bar in there too. It was kind of a dark brown, fairly bitter, but it was good. You lick them and it tastes good. [laughs]

But it was a... it was a terrific experience. Course I enjoyed it, because I enjoyed the work. And as a smokejumper I... I thoroughly enjoyed all of the training. Enjoyed my... Well, the first jump was the hardest for me.

JN Maybe you could tell me, um... I'd like to hear about the first jump and I'd also like to know your day... your training for the actual jumping? Like if they had a tower you jumped out or what did they have that you could...?

DK Yeah, maybe I ought to go into that tower first. That was the... the actual...

[INTERUPTION]

Yeah, the actual training for the jump, I should go into that before I go into my first jump. But the actual training for the jump... they used a tower and you dropped about 25 to 30 feet and then a huge rope caught you. This... you were in full suit, full harness, and it was a simulated jump.

Now, one of the things they stressed in jumping was that you were to be... when you went out of the plane, you went and you faced back toward the plane, toward the back of the... toward the
tail of the plane. Of course, the tail was no longer there. But they said, "And keep your head up!" Because when that chute opens... and it was the same thing when off of the tower, you could get... if you were looking down, you could get quite a snap. So one of the things they taught us, and it... it come through loud and clear. All you had to do was just do it once with your head down, looking down. You tried to come out and jump so that you didn't get a whiplash neck.

And it was... they judged you on your form, how you were coming out. Told you what was wrong so that you wouldn't do it the next time. We would make, uh... on the days we trained for jumping, we would do anywhere from five to ten jumps off the tower in a morning.

JN What...? How did that feel? Was...?

DK It was scary! [laughs] The first time you went off that tower, you know, you knew that rope would catch you and they had a big net below that... in case something broke. But you had a terrific sensation of falling off of that tower, you know, you had a sensation of falling. Which when you jumped, when you come out of the plane... I don't know how it was with everybody else but most of them have said the same thing... you never had the sensation of falling.

Where as off the tower you did. And, it took a lot of courage. It took two, or three, or four tries sometimes to get the guy off of the tower. I didn't have any trouble. I just blindly stepped off. [I] thought, "Here goes, I guess the rope will hold me." [laughs]

But it was a... it was a real... the training was excellent, because they had been working on this for a number of years and these gentlemen were... the people who were in charge, the Forest Service men who were in charge of training... were very conscientious about having well trained personnel. So that when you went on a fire you could do a good job. And so that when you jumped, in a parachute, if you knew what was going on... so that you just didn't get hurt, to just blindly jump out. I'm sure we had a few that had a little trouble... we had one guy there who, uh...

[END OF SIDE A]

[SIDE B]

JN So you were saying on the first jump you were jumping out of the old Ford Trimotors?

DK Yes, we jumped out of... there were two planes that we used the whole time I was in jumpers, in '45, was the Ford Trimotors, which would take up to twelve jumpers. Generally eight or ten... it would take twelve, twelve jumpers and their equipment. Or we jumped out of a Travelaire. Which was a single engine plane, but it had the same capabilities in the air as the Ford.
They were both excellent planes to jump out of. They could slow down to about... oh, 75, 80 eighty miles an hour to jump. And, consequently going out you weren't in such a slipstream. And our first jump they went up and these two guys jumped out of... these two Forest Service men jumped out of the Ford Trimotor, and the one of them jumped an Eagle chute. We had two different kinds of chutes. One was an Eagle and one was a Derry slotted Ervin. And they were both fixed so that... they could... you could guide them, or you were supposed to. One of the gentleman got an Eagle, and this Eagle would not turn. It would not do anything. It wouldn't do. And he landed off... way off in the timber. And one guy landed right out in a farmer's wheat field. [laughs]

We jumped off of the Six Mile Airport. But, the first jump, there were eight of us went up. There were eight in a squad. They had us in squads of eight. And on the first jump you took your rotation or whatever, and I was fourth man out. They jumped us, two, make another circle, jump two more, make another circle... jumped two at a time. We never went out more than... Well, once in a while we would jump three at a time, but generally two at a time so you'd... because jumping into the timber, uh... it's pretty important to keep come down, where you're supposed to.

But anyhow, our first jump I was, uh... second? I guess I was second man out. Well, I had to wait until somebody got out of the way ahead of me... and following him was not the easiest thing in the world, that was my hardest jump.

JN What made it?

DK Oh, just to wait until somebody else went ahead of me, I guess. Some people liked to jump behind somebody else. I preferred to jump first. [laughs] In fact, I always like to be the first man out.

And the first jump was... was a little tough. But once you get out, and you have... The thing of it is, you go out and you had no sense of falling. I always felt like... the old plane took a jump away from me. Just went up in the air. Of course it didn't but, uh... and you come out... and, you come out and you kind of face toward the tail and the old... chute pops open and... hey, it's the greatest feeling in the world to be up there. Floating down, you look down here and you grab your guidelines and you... start steering your chute around to wherever you want it. And if you have to slip it, why, you learn how to slip a chute.

JN What's slipping a chute, now?

DK Okay, I thought you'd ask that. But slipping a chute is making it go faster forward. Our chutes had a forward speed of about five miles an hour. And to slip it, you would pull down on your front risers. Get a hold of your front risers and pull them down so your forward speed was faster. So that you could, if you were coming down and you were heading for a clearing or something, and you saw you weren't going to get there... if you
slipped your chute you went faster, or if you were going into a wind, if you pulled down, you would go faster and you would drop a little faster. You would go forward a little faster, and you could hold it. And that’s slipping the chute.

These are some of the things they taught us, but you cannot... you cannot really learn how to slip a chute off the ground. You have to be up there coming down in the chute, to slip a chute, to learn how to slip a chute.

This... we didn't have to do any of that our first jump, we had seven? Eight. I got... I was lucky, I got in on the eighth training jump. Mostly they had seven training jumps. By that time you were supposed to know all... all there was to know about it.

**JN** Is that true?

**DK** No! You learn something about every time. Uh, you pretty well knew how to handle a chute. You see, we jumped with two chutes on. Our big one that was pulled with a rip... with the static line and then you had a safety chute strapped on your chest... which had a handle here, that in case something happened to the big chute, you pulled this. You pulled the rip cord, threw the chute away from you and it went up. And so you jumped with two chutes on. And it was a... it was a terrific experience. I loved to jump. I'd go back and do some more of it right now if they'd let me. But I don't know if they'll let me jump at this age. [laughs]

But the first jump was the toughest, after that, you knew what it was about, and then it wasn't hard to go out any more. You know, you got that feeling of security. You knew that chute was going to open. Hook that static line on just before you jumped, then you reached down and you were supposed to but a pin in it. And then the... all is what you... put this snap over the static line and then you grabbed a hold of the strap that was to your chute and you pulled it like that. Out you went.

And then you were supposed to go in and see how you could guide. Our training jumps... in our squad, you know how fellows are, competitive. We, uh... of course, money was a big thing. I mean, a dime was a great deal. But we would throw a dime in the pot and see who could come the closest. They laid a circle out of streamers about thirty feet across, and you were supposed to hit that circle. The first time we did this I draped my chute over the circle. I missed it. One guy was about a foot closer than I was. He didn't hit the circle either, but he come about a foot closer.

And then one of the jumps was... our training jumps was to go into the timber and hang up so we could learn how to come down out of a tree. We put a dime in... on that to see who would get the highest tree. And I saw this big old pine tree and I headed for that, and I hung her up. And when I came down to the end of my rope, I still dropped about ten feet without a rope. [laughs]

**JN** Gee! How long was your rope?

**DK** A hundred feet. [laughs] So I took it that day. I took the
pot that day. I missed it by a foot the day before but I took her by a pot... I took the pot by a pretty good deal on that day.

JN What was that like, hanging up that 125 feet or whatever?

DK Up on the tree? It was a nice landing because you come down and the springiness of the tree was great. And you just undo your rope. You reach in your pocket, get your rope out and unhook and make sure everythings all right. You unhook yourself and you come down the rope. But when I got to the end of the rope and I had only this much... or a hand full left and there was still about 10, 12 feet to the ground, I grabbed the rope and eased it out through until I couldn't have anymore and then I just let go and down I went. It wasn't all that bad, you know. You're young, you're not necessarily foolish but you take chances you don't after you're older.

But on a couple of fires I hung up pretty high. And I was glad for the training. I had to drop, oh... 8, 10 feet a couple times on fires where we were in heavy timber and the fire was in heavy timber, and we missed our spot. Or, like I jumped down outside of... oh, what's the town south of Hamilton? Darby! I jumped down in there one time and I deliberately went into the lodgepole that time because the clearing we thought from the air was a nice place to land... it looked nice and green and fairly smooth. When I got down there pretty close to it, when I could see where it was, it was full of huge boulders that were covered with moss and stuff like that. So I just put her into the timber. A lot better place to land than that. And our jumps were... our training jumps had specific purposes. We had... the first one was to just to go out and get down... get down on the ground safely. I never did have to use my safety chute. Some did, but I never did. I was never one of those who had to use his safety chute. I don't know, I suppose I would have, but I never had any trouble.

JN What was your roughest jump?

DK Oh... Lord, I don't know which the roughest jump was. As rough as any... well, about the second... third training jump was a rough one. The Eagles... the Eagle chutes were a bottom opening chute, a peripheral opening chute. The Derry slotted Ervins opened from the top down. The Eagles had a skirt on them... what they called a skirt. And, the Derry slotted Ervins was a round chute and it had two slots in it.

But the Eagles would open harder because they would open from the bottom up and they'd go... Pop! Like that. And I jumped an Eagle... I think it was my second or third jump that they gave... They gave me an Eagle chute. And it opened so hard that it threw me back up into the chute and it opened a second time. I got a rope burn on my neck from the lines that came down.

JN It actually... when the chute opened it sprung you up into the chute?

DK It sprung me right up... like this here sort of.
JN Took the air out of the chute then?

DK No, it didn't. Not a whole lot. But it kind of... the chute didn't really collapse but it opened... kind of opened a second time. No it didn't really collapse, it opened, but... it was tough, it... it popped. It was pretty jerky, jerky opening.

I don't know which was the toughest... toughest fire jump. I think the one that night we jumped down there in the... in the Bitterroots, west of Darby. Because we jumped late in the evening. And when we got to the fire, the fire was way up on a big old rockslide. There was a little patch of timber up there that was on fire. And that whole patch of timber could have burned up and nobody would have ever been the worse for it, but you could see the top of Darby down there.

But when we got to looking the country over, we had to jump clear down into the bottom because the hillside was just too steep. There was just no place anywheres close to the fire that we could land. So, there were just two of us that night. A fellow by the name of Hensley, [Danny M. Hensley], and myself. And on the way down there, we run into a thunderstorm. A dry... what we called a dry thunderstorm. Not much rain and a lot of thunder and lightning. And we had to go a long ways out... out around that thing to get through, because we were in a Travelaire.

We went out around this and then we found the fire. I knew the kind of country it was in. I knew it was rough country. We jumped. And that's when I got a couple hundred feet above the ground. And we jumped just about level with the fire that... it was about, I think we jumped at about, uh... oh, 1400, 1500 feet. And I got down and... we had picked out this clearing to jump into... the spotter and myself had picked out this clearing to jump into, and so I went out and I headed for this clearing and I was doing beautiful.

I was coming into the clearing just right, and I looked down and I saw it was plumb full of boulders. And I knew that you light in those boulders, you can break a leg. So I just turned my chute and I headed for the lodgepole. And I hung over about half a dozen lodgepole, and come down. Fortunately the lodgepole weren't that high. And as far as the landing, it was excellent, and the jump was good.

The worse part about that whole thing was fighting that fire because we dug trenches down in those boulders. We'd throw big boulders up. And we dug trenches there that were almost six feet deep in places... to try and get to the duff that had sifted down through the rocks over the years, out of these pine trees that were sitting up there.

And we jumped... the fighting of the fire was the toughest part of that. Because we jumped about, um... 7:30, 8:00 in the evening. It was just almost dusk when we got down. And then we got our... they kicked out the cargo chutes and we found them. Rolled up out suit and our harness and our chutes and put them in the bags. And put them there where there was a pretty decent place to make a camp, if we could. Grabbed our firefighting
equipment, uh... C-Rations. We left our sleeping bags down there because they wouldn't do us any good on the fire. Not up on that rockslide. And we went up and started fighting fire.

We climbed back up this... about 1400 feet, just rocky. Just like a... just big rock slide up over the... some timber we had up through some timber but then we got up on this rockslide. Just... Oh, it was really rugged. And we fought fire until about... we knocked down all the hotspots, because there was some sand and stuff in there that you could get a hold of but it really wasn't a whole lot. And we thought we had it fairly well contained.

We went back down the mountain in the dark, we got down there about, oh I think it was about two o'clock in the morning that we rolled out our sleeping bags. Had eaten some C-Rations, K-Rations, I don't remember which we had. Ate some stuff, and then about 4:00 in the morning I woke up to a roar and I looked up and here she had gone up one of those trees and burst into flames. So the next morning we got up early.

We went back up and they had dropped one of the old piston pumps. You could put five gallons of water in the backpack and then you had this pump that you could spray water on. And we had one of those. And so the only water we had was either down close to the creek where we had camped. Where... we had camped fairly close to the creek, we could fill up there and pack it back up the mountain. Or we could go out around the mountain, almost 1/4 of a mile and find a spring, that we found a spring there and we'd fill it up. So, we did that. We'd go out there and fill up this five gallon bag of water, come back and squirt it onto the fire to get her dampened down.

And in the afternoon... was it, uh... no, it was the second day that I woke up at night and it burst into flames. But the third day we were in then, then come in a packer [and] four other, or, three other fellows to help us. The packer was to take us out when we got the fire controlled. So we went up there and spent another whole day and the only thing we could find when we left there was coming out of the rocks way down below. Couldn't get to it. There was a little smoke seeping out, and we did everything we could to put that out. We carried water, threw dirt, moved rocks, boulders and I heard later that that fire continued to smolder until we got some terrific rains in the fall and some snow.

But that was a tough fire. I suppose the first fire I got on was one of the toughest fires that I jumped on. It was out close to Pierce, Idaho. Or, not close, it was outside of Pierce Idaho. And they had jumped eight fellows one evening or in the afternoon. And they radioed back to the boss... I think Cooley was on that fire, and Cooley radioed back. He said, "Send me sixteen more jumpers." And he says, "I'll control this thing tonight yet. I'll get her controlled yet tonight." Because with eight men... I guess eight was the biggest bunch of jumpers. He said, "With eight men I just can't handle it, we can knock down the hotspots, but we just can't handle it." All go... all told. So he said, "Send me sixteen more jumpers right away and I'll control it." Forest Service says, "Nope. We will send you 50 negro paratroopers in the morning." And Cooley says, "I don't
want 50 negro paratroopers in the morning." He says, "I want sixteen more smokejumpers tonight."

But, you can't fight City Hall. So in the morning they brought in 50 negro paratroopers from Pendleton, Oregon. Fellows that had been in the Air Force, and I don't know what group they were in, but there was 50 negro paratroopers that come in, and they weren't the greatest of firefighters. [laughs] And the next day the fire was getting away for them in spite of 50 negro paratroopers. So the next day they shoved twenty-four more smokejumpers out there on that fire.

We jumped in the evening and that was one of the roughest trips I had. Out of the eight jumpers in the plane, six of us got sick. I was the last one to get sick. But there was... the guy that got sick first didn't toss it clear outside the door and some of it came inside and it was a real rough flight out there. I was doing fine until I had to put my chest strap on, on my suit, and I felt like I couldn't get quite enough air. As the spotter was putting on my backpack, I says, "Hold it." And I stuck my head out the window and got rid of everything I had. There were six out of the eight of us got sick on that fire.

And we fought fire. That fire fight was... that was tough fire. That... we were out early that next morning. It was dark when we finally... they had supper for us there. They had jumped in a couple of cooks with the negroes and they had jumped in a fire camp. And boy, I tell you those guys could cook. We had lots of food. The next... we rolled out that night. Got to bed at dark and the next morning they rolled us out before dark... before daylight. Had breakfast and then we hit the fireline.

JN Let me ask you question about those black paratroopers. What was the feeling of the whites on the line? Did any of them...?

DK Well, they weren't impressed with their firefighting ability. [laughs] And we had one or two Southern boys in there who didn't exactly like to work with them. You know. [laughs] But all in all, we got along pretty good. All in all we got along pretty good. But when they jumped, they were not used to jumping in timber. And they did not want to use a pair of spurs to go up and climb in a tree if they if they were hung in a tree. They did not want to use spurs to go up and get that chute out, they just cut the tree down. And one of them, he cut down five trees. Or six trees, and his parachute was just in shreds.

That was the last time I know of that those negro paratroopers were used that summer as smokejumpers. Their experiment... [laughs], they had tried their experiment and found... I'll tell you, those guys... they come in in a DC-3, and they jumped four or five of them at a time. And the DC-3 is quite a bit faster than the old Ford Trimotors. But those guys were scattered over 15, 20 acres. Their chutes were scattered all over. Uh! It was really something. Like I say, they didn't... when they went to get a chute down out of a tree, they just cut the tree down.

JN Do you suppose their training had been poor or what?
DK I don't know. I don't know what it was. I don't think their training... I know their training hadn't been as good as ours, and I don't think that they had quite the interest in fighting fire that we did. We had a... we had a reputation to maintain.

You know, of all of the three years they used conscientious objectors for smokejumpers, nobody... nobody, ever failed to jump. The first person who failed to jump was on a fire in Glacier Park, was an ex-Marine paratrooper who didn't... who wouldn't jump, he went back to Missoula. He was hurting. Who am I to say he just plain didn't like the rough terrain, the rest of them jumped. The conscie's [CO's] all jumped. But he didn't jump.

JN Was there an added edge to you guys's...? Well like, first of all picking jumping to prove yourselves and second of all then to do an extra super job? Did you feel that yourself?

DK Oh yeah! Oh yes, yes, we felt... we were very... well, proud. We were very proud to be smokejumpers in the first place. This was, for the most part, this was one of the glamorous parts of CPS. Like the farm labor that I was doing in Downey, Idaho. You know, that was... there wasn't a great deal of glamour to it. I did a good job. I got to be truck driver, I got to be a heavy equipment operator and all that simply because I worked hard and because I knew something about it. And I had no problem. But menial work...

But this, while it was hard work, to be a parachutist, in the first place to be a parachutist, was something. You know, this was the elite. This was possibly one of the most glamorous. But once you got in there... you worked hard to maintain your spot there. There were 200 of us trained. There were 200 of us. In '45 when I jumped there were 200 conscientious objectors in '45. And I can't say that I really found a goof-off in the bunch. They were proud to be a smokejumper and they were proud to maintain it. We had some of them that didn't know which end was up, and I wasn't in on some of these, but some of the stories were that they really didn't know what was going on. But they were proud and they maintained their... they maintained their position. They were a smokejumper.

JN So very few of them ever got cut then?

DK No, not very many of them got cut. In our group... There was only one fellow that got cut in the bunch that I trained with, and if he had been able to control his mouth a little better and not be disrespectful to the boss... or, the Forest Service men, he would not have been cut.

[INTERUPTION]

JN Was their any resentment among the conscientious objectors for not... not being paid? Did any of those... any of your fellow...?
DK Oh, I think there was... there was a little resentment, but you know, for the most part, this was what we agreed to. This is what we had been privileged... in a way, privileged to do. Yeah, I think there was. Among some of them. I grew up poor as a churchmouse. Of course it didn't bother me not to have money. So that was really no problem but, as we... as I look back, yeah, I think there were some who would have enjoyed being paid. Oh, I'm sure I would have enjoyed being paid, but primarily we knew our circumstances, we were there, we accepted it, you know. And I'm sure that there were... I'm sure that there were fellows there without my attitude who had a different attitude. Who were perhaps were not quite as prideful about being a smokejumper as I was. Who... There were some there that I felt... they took this as a lesser of two evils at times.

They did not think of this [as] the most glamorous job in the world. But for the most part, I think most of them were very proud and very happy to have been a smokejumper. And... there's not everybody has taken the pride in it that I show with us, so... you know. I was happy to be one. I was very proud of the fact that I was one. And I... of course, I got along good with the Forest Service men. I had never had any trouble.

I was often picked to lead a crew or to do something special. And... I don't know why, but... you know, like I said, when we got out to fighting fire and stuff, why, I would go ahead and I knew what was going on. And could tell the others what was happening and why it was happening and all that. And consequently they... they would use you. You know. So it sounds like I'm bragging, I don't mean to be bragging it's just that, uh... this is where I come from. I had a good time. I had an excellent time being a smokejumper.

JN After '45 what made you leave the smokejumpers? Did you have the choice of staying on, or...?

DK No, we didn't have a choice. I possibly would have stayed in the smokejumpers had I had a choice. But you see, the... the war was over. The servicemen were getting out. The conscientious objectors were being released. But the preference for the smokejumping jobs were given to the service boys, the men who had served in the Army, Air Force, or whatever, in the services, over the conscientious objectors. And we didn't really have a lot of choice to stay in because there were too many men who were looking for a good paying job. And it was a... it's a pretty good paying job because they got some pretty good benefits out of it. And consequently we didn't have a lot of choice. There were a number of us... there were a number of us who would have gone back to being a smokejumper, but did not have the opportunity.

I think there was one fellow, one man who stayed with the Forest Service and, I think he did some jumping... after two or three years, they let him get back into jumping. And I think he's the only one. Now Ray, or, not Ray... Phil Stanley, I think, went to work for the Forest Service simply because as a radio operator... it's simply because he was terrific in radios, and he knew what was going on. He was... he had a good position with the Forest Service to continue.
I don't know for sure about Ray Stanley, or not Ray, Phil. Phil Stanley. I don't know for sure if he kept on with the Forest Service or not, but I know he was still in Missoula. But he was really terrific radio operator, really. He knew what was going on and he was doing a terrific job for the Forest Service.

JN So they kept him on?

DK I understood they did. I... for a long time I didn't... I didn't have much to do with the Forest Service or the smokejumpers because I transferred out of smokejumpers. They broke down the CPS camp at smokejumpers... nobody stayed there. I was one of the last ones to leave in January and I went to Camino, California. And from there I went on a cattleboat. Then I come back off a cattleboat and started school. I went into medicine. But I... and I enjoyed it. But I enjoyed smokejumping.

JN Let me backtrack just on one incident. We haven't had very many people that have been in or spoken of the black paratroopers, and anything you remember about that, or... is valuable to us.

DK [laughs] Yeah, my impression of the black paratroopers were that they were not real ambitious. They were lousy firefighters. Cause, eight smokejumpers could do what twenty of those guys did. And I think their attitude, you see, they were not assimilated as paratroopers, they were not assimilated quite as well.

JN How do you mean?

DK Well, they were not put in... my impression is, and I may be wrong, but my impression is that these fellows were at Pendleton simply because of... how should I say it? Political... somewhere political they were put at Pendleton, Oregon to be paratroopers there and to do some jumping, but they were not put out on the front lines as much as the white boys were.

This was my impression and I may be wrong! But as far as firefighters, as far as smokejumpers, they didn't have it. It wasn't their cup of tea. In the first place they didn't like to jump into the timber, they liked to jump in a big open field someplace. They did not like the timber. Secondly, they were not that fond of work. And they could care less whether the fire burned or didn't burn. We come by one day... one day there they were on the fire, and they had built a trench and then they were relaxing on the other side of the trench. There was some real humor to this because they weren't real well trained in the art of fire fighting. They weren't real well... or if they were well trained, they didn't display it. I'm sure there were some of them who were very good. But there were some of them who were real goof offs.

The thing about the Negro paratroopers that I enjoyed most was the fact that... the boys they brought in there to cook for us could really cook. I'll tell you, we had pork chops one night and I think I only ate four of them plus all the stuff that goes...
with it. And... there were some real funny things happen in smokejumpers too.

The second night we were there, we would fight fire from daylight till it was too dark to see what was going on, really. Although on a small fire we often fought fire all night. By the light of the fire you could knock it down, dig trenches and stuff. But on this big fire, they did not make us work all night. You know, we went out at, uh... out there fighting fire at 6:00 in the morning and we come in at 7:00 or 8:00 at night and then we would get rest. We'd get supper and rest. We had a lunch that we took out on the line. But the negro, you talk about the negro paratroopers, it was the only time I knew they were ever used, and it was such a disaster. Because... that was up Meadow Creek out there beyond Pierce, Idaho someplace. And had he had the extra sixteen he called for that night, that fire would never have gotten over five or six or seven acres. But it grew into...

That was the next day after he jumped 24... 24 more, 32 more, I know there were thirty-two of us all told. Before they jumped this extra twenty-four jumpers in there, the fire had gotten so big. You know the fire jumped our fire line. And one of the Forest Service men and myself went down through the burn, through the fire and let out a crew who had been caught down along the creek in the fire. Fortunately they were not hurt, but the fire jumped a creek that we were using as a natural barrier and went up the other side. We went across and we started here, and one crew went this way and the rest of us went this way.

JN  Opposite directions?

DK  Opposite directions, trying to pinch fire. Trying to get the fire closed in and about... oh, 3:30, 4:00 in the afternoon we turned around and somebody says, "Oh boy, look at her go." And it had gone... gotten across the creek. It had jumped and was crowning on the other side. And that was really something to see. So the fire boss, the Forest Service man on our side, Art Cochran said, "Just keep fighting here. But we'll contain that other over there later." But he said, "You guys keep on here." And he asked me if I would go with him, to go back down through and see if we could find this other crew, because they were caught back of the fire, see. It had jumped between us and them and they were caught down there. Fortunately they were caught down on the Creek, and they come... they started following the creek up. And we went back down in there, and, uh... I think they would have got out anyhow but we went in there and led them out. Make sure everything was OK.

JN  Did you have to follow the creek to get out?

DK  Yeah, we had to follow the creek to get out.

JN  In the case like that, would the creek be your protection when... as a last resort, would you...?

DK  Oh yes! You betcha, you betcha! Yeah, it was the last
You know, I knew some of the boys who got burnt up over at Helena. And I knew the squad leader, Wag Dodge.

JN At Mann Gulch?

DK Yeah. Mann Gulch, is that where it was was? The Mann Gulch fire? Had they followed... and I talked with Wag Dodge at the funeral of two of these fellows. Had they followed Wag Dodge's orders instead of panicking and mutinying, they would all be alive, after that fire.

JN Oh... he gave them orders to do what?

DK He said he saw that they were going to get caught, and he says, "Okay, we'll leave our tools here. We will build a back fire. And we will crawl into the back fire." You know, "...let it burn out, and then we'll get into the back fire. Then we'll..."

JN Get in the area where it's burnt out?

DK Get in the area where it's burnt out. And he said, "We'll be all right." And they mutinied and said, "Hey, we'll make her. We'll run ahead of the fire, we'll beat her." You can't beat a forest fire. Wag Dodge stayed and built a back fire and Wag Dodge lived.

There was one other one. There was one of them who did make it out. But there was one of them who got... I think he died later. I'm not sure about all the details. But Wag Dodge said, "Here's where our tools will be." And the tools were there. Everything was as Wag Dodge had said. But those boys mutinied and they... had they not mutinied, had they not mutinied, had they followed Wag's orders. And I knew Wag Dodge. And Wag Dodge was a good Forest Service man. He was a good fire fighter. He was a good smokejumper and he knew what he was doing.

JN Did he have any personal anger over that mutiny?

DK Yeah, he had personal anger and he was cashiered... almost cashiered, wasn't allowed to jump for a while. And it killed Wag Dodge. He died of cancer, but it really hurt him, it really did.

Two of the fellows that got burned up, one was from Columbia Falls. A fellow by the name of Hellman. [William J. Hellman] And one of the fellows that got burnt up was, uh... Thol, [Henry J. Thol, Jr.], whose father had worked for the Forest Service for years. Old Henry Thol was a ranger who was the Ranger at Big Prairie, when I was there in '43. And Henry Thol was an excellent person. But one of his boys got burnt up in that fire. And, Henry was very bitter about it. I don't blame him, he lost his son. But had the kids not mutinied, they would have all lived.

JN Did Wag go into any detail at all about the scene there at the fire when they mutinied, or anything?
DK No, not a whole lot, I saw him at the funeral, I chatted with him. I was already in college and I was home for the summer. He did not go into a lot of detail about it. I chatted with him after the funeral. He was very sick about the fact that he had lost thirteen men, you know. Why shouldn't he be?

JN Did he come out and say... say at that trail about the mutiny?

DK I never was at the trial. I just talked with him after the funeral. But I would imagine he told the truth because Wag was very poor at lying. He told her as it was. Wag was an honest man and I respected Wag a lot. We didn't see eye to eye on religious matters, but he respected me and I respect him very much. He was a great guy.

JN Well, in looking back on this experience as a smokejumper, anything you'd, uh... you'd like to change about how it was run? How the operation was run?

DK You know, I don't believe there is. Really, when I think back about it, maybe I could get a few more jumps in. [laughs] The Forest Service run it to the best of their ability. You know, it's government run and not everything that's government run is run right. Or at least I don't think so. But as I look back on smokejumping, on my experience at smokejumping, we were well trained, we worked hard at it, and we were very prideful in doing the job. And I think perhaps as Earl Cooley says, he has never had... Have you ever interviewed Earl Cooley? Do you know Earl Cooley?

JN No, I don't think so.

DK He was with the conscientious objectors, and we always invite him to our... to our, um...

JN Reunion?

DK Reunions. Earl... I've heard him say. He never had a better bunch of jumpers, as a rule. He said they were the finest he had in all the years he was with it. And he was with the smokejumpers a lot of years. He said there were never a better bunch of jumpers. And I think part of it was the fact that we considered it a real privileged. Not just a job, it was more than a job with us. It wasn't a paycheck. It was... we were proud to be a smokejumper. And they treated us well. I'll tell you, I had no complaints of the way the Forest Service treated us. I think they were very fair. We had some excellent men there. They were there to do a job, and they did it.

They... there were some personalities clash. There were some personality clashes between some of the conscientious objectors and some of the, you know... the Forest Service men. Like I said, uh... this one kid, I'm sure he would have went right on through, had he not been just a little too lippy. He wasn't disrespectful, totally disrespectful, but he made some remarks...
and one of the Forest Service men took exception to it and he found a way to get rid of him.

JN Do you recall what the issue was over?

DK I don't know what the issue was over. He wasn't in my squad he was... see, in '45 they trained 100... well, they trained 200 fellows and I was part of the first group they trained. And then there was a second group came in. And he was with the first group, but he was not in my squad. Hey! Those Forest Service men, they had a good job to do. They had a job to do, but they were not without fault.

I had a brother who was in that second group and his squad leader wasn't the easiest person in the world to get along with and my brother doesn't always keep his mouth where it should be either. He almost... well, he didn't almost, he just... they just had some differences of opinion. [laughs] But they got along. He stayed in there.

JN They way you people saw it as a privileged was... can you describe in what way it was a privileged to be...?

DK Well... and I can only say for myself, it was a privileged to be in this elite... in this elite group. You know if we got on a big fire, and they had to walk in ground crew to help contain it... for instance, I jumped up here in Anawa Basin up on the South Fork of the Flathead one time. And we jumped about 4:00 - 4:30 in the afternoon and there were four of us. And we didn't stop to eat supper, we didn't stop to eat midnight lunch. We worked right through until about 6:00 in the morning. About 2:00 in the morning there was a ground crew hiked in. We kept right on a working until the fire was fairly well contained, okay. And then I crawled off, and I ate some rations and I slept for about one hour, an hour and a half, and then I went back on the fire line. And we had it well controlled but then when we got to leave, and the ground crew had to mop it up, if there were just two fellows on a fire you had to mop up. But if it was a big fire where you got in ground crew, where they hiked in a bunch... hey, they did the mopping up. You didn't.

You know, you... you were sort of the elite. [laughs] You know, the favored few. And there were a lot of boys who would have, out of CPS, I'm sure, who would have gone into smokejumping, but did not get the opportunity. And I feel real fortunate because I think one of the reasons I got in was because of my background. Although, that's not the only reason.

JN So the privileged...

END OF THE INTERVIEW