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Interview with Jim Klump by Susan Green. Smokejumper Oral History Project. OH #133-56.

SG This is an interview with Jim Klump who jumped at Redding, California from 1964 to 1974. And Jim, tell me a little bit about what kinds of work experience you had before you got involved in the smokejumping.

JK I'd worked on ranches when I was a kid and I'd worked in the woods with my... my dad was a logger and I'd worked with him off and on doing different type stuff, cut fire wood and posts for money. I started out... let me see, the summer I was 16 I started out as a fire fighter for the Forest Service. Summer I was 17, I worked for C.D.F. The following summer I went to work full time for the Forest Service... or as a seasonal for the Forest Service, decided to make a job out of it. And, ah, maintained that up until '64 when I started jumping then, you know, I was on an engine, I'd been an engine crewman, operator on an engine, and went into jumping. Then during the retread program I went back to being an engine foreman, ah, helitac foreman, in fact my helitac crew is the first helitac crew ever to rappel. Yeah, helicopter 2 on the Klamath, that was 1969, we did our first rappelling; didn't work out too well.

SG The first ones are always [inaudible] [laughs].

JK Yeah, yeah. The, ah, in fact the first rappelling to be done by the Forest Service was done by the Redding jumpers in '64, we rappelled... both rappelled and parachuted out of a Bell 204 that was owned by Worldwide Helicopters. And who... who were the pilots? Ralph Johnston was the North Zone helicopter specialist at that time. Let me see, in '71 I became a District Fire Prevention Officer on the Klamath. In '74 I went to the, ah... 1974 went to the Tahoe as Fire Management Officer on the Truckee District. In '79 [I] moved here to LaPort District as Fire Management Officer.

SG During those years before you were jumping, did you ever have an opportunity to meet any smokejumpers, or how was it that you came to hear about smokejumping?

JK Yeah, I'd seen guys jump fires, you know, from, ah, either I'd be on fires and they'd jump across a canyon. There was a man, one of the people who was somewhat of a driving force to get me into the Forest Service was a man by the name of Gene Newton, he's the District Dispatcher on the Scott River District. Gene's the judge in Ft. Jones now, local judge. He was a district dispatcher... in those days they had district dispatching, each individual district had their own dispatching... and used to come up to the logging camp where we lived, ah, we lived in a fruit growers logging camp, my dad was a logger, and he came up to... and I think he came up to maintain the phone lines and stuff, in those days a lot of rural phone lines went into the district office in Ft. Jones, into the Forest Service office. Anyway Gene would stop by and pick me up and ask me if I wanted to go up to
one of the lookouts or drive around with him, and I did that and I think that's where I got interested in the Forest Service. My dad being a logger wasn't jet hot on me working for the Forest Service, of course. But, I think that's where I first got started.

SG What kind of impressions did you remember having about jumpers? What kind of people did you think they were?

JK Um, I thought they were, ah... you know, as a kid I thought they were really something. I, you know, just stand around and stare at them. And, ah, ah, I was impressed with it and I think as soon as... I think... it was one of those things that the first time you see an airplane fly over you want to be an airplane pilot, you know, that type of thing. And I wanted to be a smokejumper, you know, I thought that'd be neat. Um, my real impression that I had on jumpers was... trying to remember the year, like 1959... 1959, Harold Hertoger, who my brother went to high school with flew helicopters. He owned or his dad owned Aetna Helicopters there in Scott Valley... flew my buddy and I into Eucanaw Mountain, ah, which is on the Eucanaw District of the Klamath. And we had to walk into this lightning fire on the ridge... and I think it was on the ridge between Eucanaw Creek and Cub Creek... and we walked all night, I mean stumbled and, you know, and the batteries start going dead in your flashlight, the whole nine yards, we walked all night, like 9:30 in the morning we can look down on the next knob on this ridge and we're just about there, Twin Beech comes over and kicks some streamers out, and next pass, ah, couple of jumpers come out, next pass couple more come out, and they come down and dump their cargo. And I remember dragging up to that fire and here are these guys; good rations, good night's sleep, talking about having a beer the night before down at the local pub and stuff, and I went, "Hey, I got to get into that!" I... you know, I was about that age where I went, "Hey, this walking just don't hack it. But that was probably the big impression right there.

SG When do you remember applying for the job?

JK It was in like '63... like late in '63, they wanted the APS in like December or something like that. And Willy Munson and I from the Klamath applied. I had a... it was kind of... it was kind of neat, I was playing town team basketball at the time, and I knew this guy from Weaverville, Rich Farmer, who, ah, um... it was kind of funny we were tal[king]... we'd played in a tournament, and after the tournament we were sitting around having a beer and Farmer who now is the Fire Management Officer on the Scott River District, my old home town. But anyway Farmer, ah, ah... I said, "What do you do?" And he said, "Oh, I work for the Forest Service." And I said, "Hey, so do I." And I said, ah... or one or the other of us said "In fact, ah, I applied for the jumpers this year." And the other one said, "So did I." Anyway, Farmer and I poed (?) together in '64 and neither or us missed any of the year retreading through '74. So I think Richard and I are the two oldest retreads out of the
Redding base. I think he and I probably retreaded more years than anyone else during the retread program. There were other guys who started earlier and like quit in '74, but went several years without retreading and stuff, where he and I just kept hanging in there.

SG When you applied to the program did you apply to be a retread? Was that your intention, or did you...?

JK No, I just... no at the time I didn't really understand... you know, I didn't know what retreading was or anything, I just applied to be a jumper, and I believe at the time that I only planned on going the one year, but once I did it, you know, hell I didn't want to quit.

SG Yeah, after your application was I guess accepted, um, what happened, ah... what was it like that first day that you arrived on the base?

JK First day. There were guys like from all over California, quite a few guys from Southern California... let me see... the only people I knew, if I recall... the only people I knew were Farmer and Munson... Willy Munson. And it was one of those deals where, ah, like boot camp or something, you know, it was, ah... everybody's new and trying to feel one another out... some guys are jockeying for position, you know, [laughs] some guys know the overhead, you know. And so, everybody's trying to get things to shake out in their favor as soon as they can. [laughs] But, ah, no, it was just one of those things, you know, a bunch of new people and meeting them and listen to their lines and [laughs]. But I remember McDonald, I remember Black Mack, ah, in fact he did the interview... I'm pretty sure Mack did the interview on me and Willy... Willy and I both. Yeah, I'm pretty sure it was McDonald... yeah, Mack came up. Did you talk to Mack?

SG No I heard a lot about Black Mack. Do you know where he got his nickname? Hum, what was his position?

JK He was the foreman. Yeah, one of his favorite sayings is, "If we don't do it today, we'll never do it." Yeah, yeah, get up in the morning of a practice jump, you know, and the flag would be standing straight out and he'd go "Hey, if we don't do it today, we'll never do it" [laughs]. Another one was "live and learn" [laughs].

SG He had a few of those did he.

JK Yeah.

SG Do you remember meeting him before you actually started to train?

JK Yeah, yeah, he came up and did the interview. I don't remember much of the interview... it's like any other interview,
you're trying to say all the right stuff, you know, you never do
[laughs].

SG Obviously you did, you worked there for four years. Got any
impressions of your training, what the training was like?

JK Yeah, it was really, as far as training was concerned it was
hard. I remember, yeah, at... you become like a... at any jump
base I'm sure it's the same way, you can remember what the wood
shavings look like in the pits, you remember what the soil looks
like, [laughs] the hard packed ground around the Redding base,
you remember slamming into the red dust. Repetition, going
through some basic things and just trying to make it second
nature, especially those things that involved safety and what to
do in case of parachute malfunction and stuff like that. In
those days it seemed like everybody was in pretty doggone good
physical condition, but there were still a lot of.... Oh, and in
those days we used to run with our boots on... I notice now...
yeah, I stopped by the base a couple of years ago and it looked
like Hari Krishna session, all the guys were out there in their
little shorts and they even have little foam rubber pads for
doing their own little stretching exercises. And it used to be
one guy'd get up and go "all right, jumping jacks by the number,
one, two, three, four," and you'd do all, you know. And now it's
little stretchers and the guys are in terrific... obviously
because they're not wearing any clothes you can see that they're
in good physical condition, but everybody's around wearing
special little shoes and little jock outfits and stuff. In the
old days it wasn't that way, you know, you worked out in your
clothes and you sweat in them and smelled like an old goat by the
end of the day, that's the way it was, you know. But I think
they found for instance stretching exercises are a lot better for
you and prevent more accidents, although they seem to have as
many if not more accidents than we did. But anyway that's one of
the changes I've seen over the years.

SG Hum, the stretching and all.

JK Yeah, stretching versus going out and pumping out push-ups
and set-ups and side-straddle hops and that stuff.

SG Do you think the physical fitness though is about the same?

JK I think it is... I think it is, I think there's more
emphasis, you know, we didn't have a weight room, I think they
have a weight room now, and put more emphasis on weight lifting
and some of that type of stuff.

SG Hum, sounds like your training was pretty tough, pretty
strict.

JK Yeah, yeah. You know, and having worked for C.D.F. as far as
the discipline and stuff like that, they were... in those days it
was almost militaristic. So I wasn't shocked with any discipline
stuff. As far as hard work I'd always worked hard, and so that
didn't bother me much, or it wasn't any shock to my system.

SG  Did you remember it being a shock to anyone elses system especially, people who might have not been used to that or...?

JK  Um, not... not specifically, there were people who under pressure respond, you know, you get a negative response out of them. And I can think of a couple people in a couple of situations, you know, getting mad about something, but nothing to where, you know, they went to fisticuffs over or anything like that. One thing I do remember there was this guy, Nielson, from Cleveland, and we used to call... I'm trying to think of Nielson's first name... we called him "The Snake", he was a big, tall guy... and the old let down tower used to be these 30 foot towers with a cable and you'd get hoisted up on this cable and then you had to make your let down from that. Well I was in the tower, you know, different groups going through different parts of the unit. I was in the tower and "The Snake" was always jacking his jaws, he was always having to say something about everything. And he was jacking his jaws with somebody and I was watching him do his let down, he was going by the numbers, took his let down rope out of his leg pocket... er, he took the end of it, pulled it out of the bird’s nest, flipped it over the cable, jacked his jaws, went over and [laughs] undid one capewell, jacked his jaws some more, went over to undo the other capewell, and about that time I knew something was wrong. About that time it dawned on me what it was, and about that time it dawned on him what it was because he hit the ground [laughs]. He popped that capewell and just and, ah, yeah... just a big cloud of... I'll never forget poor old "Snake" laying there on the ground twitching, and there was just a big pile... a big cloud of red dust kind of went "whoof", you know, where he hit, dinged his hip up, you know, he hobbled around for quite a few days. But probably in the training that's one of the things that I really remember as far as something going on and a guy getting himself into trouble like that [laughs]. It was in, ah, '64 during training we had a guy by the name of Carl Bader, he was from the El Dorado. And Carl had been in helitac, had done a lot of heli-jumping... in those days they used to heli-jump and stuff. But [he] could not do an exit off of the tower. He finally washed out because of it; could not jump off the tower. The first time, Bill Boles was one of the squad leaders, first time Boles booted him out and thought once he felt the exhilaration [laughs] of flight, that, you know, that he'd get hooked on it. Well he only got semi-hooked, the next time he came up it, and... and he jumped but he turned around and he looked like a cat turning around and tried to grab the tower again. And, ah, but anyway Boles went "that's it," poor old Bader had to head for home.

SG  Do you think that the training procedures were real good though for getting people used to what happened to you?

JK  Oh definitely, definitely, yeah, they're good for... the procedures that they used were good for that. Repetition, drilling into your head that if something went wrong you knew
where to go for pulling the reserve. And I think there was a team work thing involved that dawned on you that you had to rely on one another. Jumpers that on a crew it's somewhat of an individual trip on one side of the coin but the other side, you know, you're very... really dependent... you're really dependent and I think the training kind of built on that. And, ah, ah, I had that feeling that when... by the time you got done with training and your training jumps and everything; pretty tight knit bunch of guys.

SG  Do you have many recollections of your first training jump?

JK  Oh, yeah, yeah. I can remember it quite vividly. It was real early in the morning, we jumped a Curtis Commando C-46 real early in the morning. And I remember looking at that plane and I went "Whoa. I don't know if I'm gonna even load up without getting air sick in this sucker." You know, I mean it's a... yeah, I thought it was really big, and we brought in real early in the morning I can remember that. Ah, pretty tense, everything was pretty tense. Ah, and we flew somewhere north I don't think it was Jones Valley, somewhere like, um, out off old Oregon Trail north of the airport, and it was a plowed field, I remember that. It was close to... we had a jump spot years later called Fuj's Farm, Vern Stevenson... I don't know if you ever heard of Fuj... but anyway Fuj's folks had a farm... that's a tough one to say... Fuj's folks had a farm [laughs] out there and anyway it was close to there. But I remember that that C-46 circling like over these neighborhoods and people out, staring up, and I thought, "Oh, God, they're going to watch me die." you know, and the line's getting shorter, you know, and I can remember standing in the door and the spotter hitting me in... like my legs were just like jelly. I didn't even know if I could move. There was like a pain in my chest [laughs]. I don't know whether I'd cinched my harness down too tight or I was having angina pains. But I remember going out the door of the plane and taking a deep breath and inhaling exhaust fumes from the engine. And... I went into perfect body position. I looked down at the ground, at my feet, and I could see my feet about three feet apart and clouds whirling... [laughs] whirling by... so I must have looked like a cat going out of the door of that thing too. Must have been terrible. But I'd been in planes ever since I was a little kid so I thought I had a good perception between air and ground when you come in to land, I couldn't tell whether the clods in the field were about a foot in diameter or an inch in diameter [laughs]. And like, you know, in training they go "OK, you get your feet together, your hands on the risers, and you look at the horizon." Well I did that from like a thousand feet [laughs] and I held it until I was about three feet from the ground and then I looked down [laughs].

SG  You're not supposed to look down at all, huh?

JK  No, no.

SG  What are the reasons for that?
Because you go over on your... you'd follow your head, what you want to do is come down on your hip to whip out a roll, and I looked at the ground and my feet hit and immediately my forehead hit about two feet [laughs] in front of my feet. But, ah, no, I can remember that depth... you know you got to... pretty soon you have to learn to, ah, develop depth perception, all those things. Actually I became a pretty good parachutist, over time. I got pretty good at it. Some people never did, some people picked it up like by the end of the practice jumps, by the end of the seventh jump some guys were pretty good at manipulating parachutes, some guys hadn't learned to open their eyes yet [laughs]. We called them night jumpers [laughs].

Well how do you hit the jump spot when you don't look down?

Oh, you can look... see you can look down on the way down, only right within the last... as you're getting ready to... make your roll you want to keep the head up, yeah, no you... it's illegal to look down [laughs]. But, ah, no you... you, ah... in fact you do, you keep your eyes glued to the spot and maneuver toward the spot, back and forth, make sure you get set up and everything, but right at the last minute you put your head up too so that you don't fall over on your face.

So your practice jumps went pretty well?

Yeah, yeah.

Any other particularly memorable practice jumps, things, like problems that developed or nice jumps?

Well, you know, we used to have... I don't know if any of the other bases related to you that we used to put a dollar on the spot and whoever hit closest would, ah... yeah, well, you know, they don't do it anymore because of some pretty, ah... well legally, I mean out front they don't they may still do it. Toward pay day one time and I was getting pretty short on green energy [laughs], but, it was a practice jump we all pooled our money in and I went, "Hey, I want this bad." And it was windier than hell and, ah, that was one of the times that they were carrying us like a long way past the spot and we were jumping in a wheat field, a bunch of stubble. One stick had gone out... I think it was a three... yeah, a three man stick had gone out... we were jumping the Doug, and I was in the next stick and I went for it and I came out, I held in. And they'd carried us too far... I think Schlegel was spotting, ah, we used to call him Shotgun Schlegel, yeah, his, ah, he used [laughs] to... he used to use drift streamers like a... well, like there was no end to them... but anyway when he'd run out of drift streamers he'd use jumpers. But anyway old Schlegel carries us past the spot and I went out, I held into it and I saw but I had to run with it. So I turned around and I started running with it. My doggone angle on the spot was just holding and I went, "Hey, I know I'm supposed to turn into it but there's a little... there's money on that," and
I zeroed in on that sucker and I hit right on the corner of the panel. I hit, kind of went up in the air, and came down on face in this wheat stubble and stubble [laughs]... and went up through my face mask and poked the hell out of my face. But anyway they said that from the plane... they were watching and from the plane they could see a little puff of dust when I hit. And that was one where I hit and it kind of stunned me... the ground was pretty hard, it kind of stunned me. Well wind grabbed my chute and took off dragging me across this wheat field. And I remember going past McDonald and Mack was standing there with his gold rimmed glasses with his hands folded across his chest looking at me [laughs] going, "Live and learn." [laughs] "Live and learn." Well he wouldn't... you know and he didn't even make an attempt to collapse my chute. Anyway I collapsed it, won the money. But I had another way of making money there at Redding also. When it was getting close to pay day, when we'd go out drinking and we had this ground level trampoline, and, ah, the bottom of it used to get oak leaves in it. But anyway we'd come in 1:30, 2:00 [AM] something like that and I'd go "OK." and everybody'd be beered up, and I'd go, "All right, everybody on the trampoline." Well everybody'd get on the trampoline, I'd [laughs] go... go, "OK. let's..." so everybody would do their little routine on the trampoline OK. So, ah... we'd all go to bed. And, ah, in the morning... [pause] but anyway we'd get up in the morning and I'd have grounds duty for doing grounds maintenance. One of the first things I'd do is get down under the leaves in the trampoline and pick all the change out [laughs]. And they never wised up to that over all those years they never wised up to it [laughs]. That's toward pay day I'd get my spending money that way, yeah.

SG It sounds like you had a real good time during that training really.

JK Oh, yeah, oh, yeah, I always had a good time there.

SG So by the time you were done with your training it sounds like you were a pretty tight knit group.

JK Yeah, yeah, everybody was pretty, you know in group like that there's kind of pecking order and stuff, but it was a good one, it was a manageable situation. One of the better groups... probably the best group that I've ever been around in that kind of situation, some good people, some just top notch people. Ah, classroom... you know, we had a lot of classroom work, they put quite an investment in training, ah, geez everything from hydraulics to on job training skills and a lot of things because the training program... I think this is where Redding really had it... the training program for the technician was pretty doggone good, and I think when they did away with the type of jump program that they had in those days where they took guys in, trained them, and with the retread thing where they got the retread program made the jumper program much closer to the forests, everybody had a local guy in the program and thought about jumpers more. They were probably utilized more and had more support. I think when they did away with the retread
program with the training that exists now they lost a lot, they lost a heck of a lot. By the time training was over it was a pretty mellow bunch, everybody had everybody pretty well figured out and could deal with it.

SG But you were talking about that pecking order, was that just among rookies or was that at the base?

JK Well, you know, you've got your heirarchy, McDonald ran the outfit, there was no question about that. Ted Cautel was one of the foremen... let me see Ted Cautel was like McDonald's assistant, and then the two squad leaders were Schlegel and, ah, Brian Shaffer, Old Blue. And it was pretty for... for being a poge... from the poge standpoint it was a good... it was a good atmosphere, pretty positive. Yeah. I've always been one that avoided office politics and that stuff anyway so sometimes with the heavy duty pecking order stuff and... and, ah, I've never gotten into that so.

SG So there wasn't a real heavy duty pecking order among the rookies or...?

JK No, in fact it was, ah... it was somewhat of a positive thing because any time you have like 20, 25 people you got a couple geeks [laughs]. I mean, really. So, ah, this time there with our crew there was me and one other guy [laughs]... but as a crew... nah, as a crew everybody pretty well... as I remember it, everybody understood the responsibility of being a crew member to take the weakness and pick up on it, learn from the strength. It's pretty positive. You know one of the first things we did and one of the first things McDonald did with our crew down there is we took a tour through... this is the kind of a guy Mack was... took a tour through the U.S. Plywood Mill, lumber mill down in Anderson. And I think Mack had a good feel for letting the fireman, the jumper, whoever, know what part they played in resource management and the end result was, you know, a board or a hunk of plywood. And, ah, I think we need to do more, ah... we need to do more of that type of thing with all people in the Forest Service. Get the end result objectives a little more clear. Mack was pretty good at that.

SG Hum, so you always knew your place as jumper... I mean you... you had the goals in mind when you were there, ah, you knew your job real well, is that what you're saying?

JK Um, pretty much so. But as far as being like a whiz kid in the academic end of it and stuff, no I came out like, ah, I didn't rate very high... and you know they rated us like I through however many there were, 20 or 25, and, ah, no, I didn't do very... I learned a lot but I never have been a test taker, I never have been good at the taking tests and quizzes and stuff like that. And that's... you know that's how you... that's the only way you can measure a group like that, but I never have been good at it. I learned a lot... I learned a heck of a lot. Probably the biggest experience as far as the experience thing
was to get, ah... being exposed to people from throughout the region. That was probably... for me it was one of the biggest things, to see where other people were. To talk over a beer in the evening, you know, "Hey what do you do in this situation." Hose evolutions were just coming in in those days, buys were starting to put hose packs and hose bags and stuff on their engines, ah, saying... realizing that you can deploy hose faster we'd talk about that type of stuff. Um, slash burning, you know, we'd really impart slash burning stuff to the guys from down south.

SG When you say exposure to people, there were people who were not necessarily jumpers?

JK No, well, no, most of them were jumpers, most were, you know, guys who came to do the same thing you did, you know, Forest Service guys, all about the same either... seemed like there were some A.F.M.O.'s; it seemed like Don Spence and Dick Calkins, they were A.F.M.O.'s and the rest of us were like foremen or T.T.O.'s at that time. So I don't know the average... probably the average experience was four or five years, something like that.

SG Do you have any memories of your first fire jump?

JK Yeah, yeah, it was on the Yolla Bolla District at Shasta-T, a place called Red Mountain. Who in the heck was the name of... Butch Mock... Butch Mock was the... was the name of the guy that I jumped it with. It was a two manner and wasn't very big, like a tenth of an acre, and that night a thunderstorm... I remember a thunderstorm came through and started a whole bunch of fires right in the... proximity of our fire. None close enough to walk to. But we walked out. Oh, and Schlegel hosed me out of a jump that next afternoon because we walked out to the road and and he ranked me getting on the helicopter and got back and got another fire jump on me. But, ah... that was another trick that I learned as far as getting back on the jump list. In the retread program they used to come along and pick you up like in a little Cesna 182 or something, fly you down to Redding... and over the years, you know, the forests up at Klamath had, ah, oh, Dave Atwood, his nickname was Lamby or Ovis Woolite... most guys called him Lamby... and then, ah... what was his name from the goose nest Dave Williams, his name was Shep, he had hair that always hung down in his eyes and he looked like a sheep dog. But anyway one of things that I learned to, get your name on the jump list is that like if three of us came in the plane, it didn't matter where you sat in the plane or how you got your gear out because what I'd do is I'd [laughs] and they never wised up to this. I'd leave [laughs] like their hard hat or their gloves in the plane somewhere [laughs] and the... they might even have the jump on me headed for the loft and I'd go "Hey, ah, hey, Lamby you left your gloves in the plane," he'd have to go back, I'd beat him and get my name... anyway [laughs].

SG Boy you had lots of little tricks?
JK Oh, yeah, yeah, you had to around there. Redding was a place. You know, I don't know if any of the other guys talked about Bob Kersch and some of those people. There were some people around there that you really... ah, Kersch was the loft foreman in Redding... but really, you had to... Redding was kind of a town without pity, um, a tight knit group, good friends, but a town without pity... I mean speech impediments, it didn't make any difference, nothing was sacred to that group. That when it came time to take a shot at somebody the field was wide open. Maybe that's one of those things that builds this tightness among jumpers, that you don't hold anything back. But anyway I just thought, ah, that, ah, that was another trick that I learned over the years. And I... and, you know, I guess that's what the definition of an experienced jumper is... how to come by spending money and [laughs] pay into the paper and....

SG Did you figure out those tricks yourself or did you learn them from another jumper?

JK Those two there, the trampoline gig and the leaving an article in the plane, that was my original.

SG You're talented.

JK Yeah, that was a Klump original.

SG Were you ever a retread that first year?

JK No, see I stayed there all year. That first year the crew stays at the base all year so you're actually not a retread, just the succeeding years, ah, you start retreading, that's when you... you'd... see then they'd bring another 20 or 25 in and that would be the regular jumpers. The retreads would go back to the district and do their regular job and then when a situation came up that they needed jumpers, just load, come in, suit up, and jump, worked good.

SG Did you decide to become a retread that first year?

JK Yeah, '65... yeah, '65, I decided to retread and then went through '74.

SG Why did you decide to retread instead of staying as a regular jumper?

JK Well see to stay a regular jumper I'd have to give my appointment up which I didn't want to do. And luckily enough I... through those ten years that I retreaded that I had, ah, district F.M.O.'s that were really supportive and I was allowed to do it. Some people didn't have the support, that's why some guys would retread a year and they'd get a new F.M.O. or something and they didn't have the support so they'd go a couple, three years without it. But if you had people like I did, well I had Ralph Ramsey, Ralph's dead now... Zack Walton, ah, Glen
Robinson. ah, guys like that who were really supportive of the program, used jumpers, knew how to use them. That's what's made the program stay here in California, just people like them.

SG The retread program?

JK Well I think that the retread, you know, the retread program hasn't stayed and it went by the wayside and it was because there weren't enough people supporting it, right.

SG Within the Forest Service?

JK Within the Forest Service, yeah, and probably District Fire Management Officers, Forest Fire Management Officers who don't understand the program. And one of the things that's killed it here in Northern California is that in certain areas, and I think each forest should identify those areas, and then for manpower... that when you want manpower, then you don't give the forest the option that automatically you use jumpers, if that's the closest resource. And... you know, we're under the closest resource concept now. And the I.C.S. dispatch system says use the closest resource so if you need a crew you should go with the jumpers. Puts a little more emphasis and a little more need on that jump program.

SG Was there any animosity toward the jumper program at all at the Forest Service?

JK No, huh uh. Well not really animosity, you always heard the boogie man stories, any time you have a group that somebody calls elite you're going to have some degree of animosity. There was for years the Forest Supervisor here on the Plymouths, Bill Peak, ah, old Bill used to get involved in minute detail... I guess he was a heck of a guy, ah, ah, knew his people, his people liked him but he used to get involved in minute detail. Like he walked in on a fire one time that the jumpers had jumped and found them in tee shirts and hard hats, well that's not... there's no excuse for that. And they didn't jump the Plymouths for quite some time after that. But some of those type things. But any time you get a group of people that... that someone calls an elite and a personal... a newspaper reporter goes "hey here's an elite group," even though there no more elite than this engine crew sitting over here. Um, there's bound to be some scrutiny, some looking at them from a different angle and stuff and I saw that over the years... I could see that. And one of the things, I realized it. I always tried to do my best to make darn sure I talked to people kept it upbeat, made sure that I was doing a good job. You're running out of tape.

[END OF SIDE A]

[SIDE B]

SG Well do you recall after that first year, first rookie year, did other people in town treat you as if you were elite? Was
There any kind of an image that was now sticking to you that you didn't have before you became a jumper?

JK Yeah, oh, yeah. There were people, you know, that really didn't understand what it was and wanted to talk about it and everything, and I didn't let them down [laughs]. No it, ah, ah, and coming from my home town, you know, everybody knew what a jumper was, um, a lot of people... you know most everybody in my home town had seen guys jump, you know, had been driving up the road during a lightning storm or after a lightning storm see people jump. And went, "Wow, that...," you know "...that's really something." And so, yeah, I was treated a little different by people in town, you know, just town folks and a little different by people back on the district and on the forest just... I don't know if that was because the jumper thing or that I'd made a step to get out of Scott Valley and do something different, which was unusual. A lot of people born in Scott Valley, ah, die in Scott Valley, [laughs] and, you know, you go into the military or something is a big deal, you know, so when you get home everybody treats you a little different.

SG Was it "good" different?

JK Oh, yeah, yeah. It was, ah... it was... the... the experience... the experience of jumping like up home, ah, was definitely positive, you know, people, um, I can still go home and people might introduce me as "Yeah, that's Jake, he used to smokejump," yeah, oh, yeah.

SG Hum, it sticks too?

JK Oh, yeah, yeah. It's something for somebody to identify with. People still do, you know, somebody will hear that you're a smokejumper and walk up and go, "Hey, I worked for the B.L.M. in Alaska and blah, blah, blah."

SG A celebrity.

JK Yeah, yeah.

SG During that first year how many total jumps did you make that you can recall?

JK I think ten... ten... no, no there was more than that, we had seven... let me see I had what... three fire jumps... did I have three fire jumps my first year? Seems like I had three fire jumps and probably nine or ten practice jumps, so twelve, thirteen jumps in all.

SG Any particularly memorable fire jumps you did during that first year?

JK Huh uh, no, the, ah, like the first one, of course, you
know, just because it's your first one. And that wasn't as impressive as going out in the Doug over on the Hay Fork... I think it was the Hay Fork District... ah, a day or two before and circling around and getting completely disorganized in the plane and watching some guys jump into some bodacious timber. And I was just going, "Whoa!" I don't know... yeah, yeah, it was in a thunderstorm, it was still raining and everything. We were doing turns and what have you, and I was always... I always thought I was a whiz kid at navigating in an airplane, you know, and I got so turned around I didn't know where I was. But, ah, which... that was something that kind of shocked me, I mean that kind of spooked me. But then the fire jump that I did we took off... somebody said it was on the Yolla Bolla... we took off, flew right out to it, jumped it, nothing... no big deal. Seems like my next jump... my next jump was on the old Redwood District on the Six Rivers, and we circled the lookout called, ah, the name of the lookout was Red Mountain also on... on that one, that was up on the Six Rivers. And we jumped right below a place called Doctor Rock, I remember this because I went back... I finally transferred to the Yukonon District and Doctor Rock was right on the border between that and the old Redwood District. Anyway when we circled this lookout you could look down and see the ocean, so that's kind of neat too... be able, you know, it was in the redwoods and, ah, right on the edge of the redwood country. But as far as really memorable jumps I don't know... probably Shep... one Shep and I jumped on the Middle Fork of the Salmon one time was. We went out of McCall and apparently they'd flown out there a couple of times that day and thrown streamers and the wind was too much. Spotter this one evening... old Shep... Shep was a good hand, top jumper, knew how to handle a parachute, knew how to work when he got on the ground. And we circled this fire and there was a little drift to it but the jump spot was one of those... it was just a bum jump spot whether the wind would have been blowing or it'd been calm. And it was steep on a real wedge shaped ridge and the fire rolled down a chute, and the spotter says, "Hey, ah, you know, you guys want to jump it?" And we said, "Hell yeah," you know, it was getting toward evening and we wanted to get the hell out of the plane. And that was a neat one just from the standpoint that it was a long drift out over this canyon and then the last minute you just turned into it and tried to shoot back onto the lea side of the ridge which we both did... both of us went right in on the spot. Then cut a good helispot with a misery whip, Shep was good on the business end of a misery whip too. Seemed like we, ah... we got a couple of sage hens... or those, ah, like grouse... we cooked them babies up for dinner that night. Oh, and that was the same jump that that next morning we went down... that Japanese guy down at this Flying B Ranch... this Japanese guy, ah, that he and I had the beer for breakfast, yeah.

SG  But that was your first year... that was during your first year or was this was later?

JK  No, no, that was much later, yeah, no. First year as far as, you know, they were just basic, like two manners, nothing
really big, no barn burns.

SG So what were your impressions of jumping after that first year, had you decided to return the next year?

JK Um hum, yeah, I liked it. I was hooked on it, wanted to make, ah... I'd liked to have... see the retread thing was good... it was kind of the best of both worlds, a heck a lot better than the situation as it is now. Now it's really seasonal, you know, in those days hell, you had your regular job back on the district, worked all year, so it, you know, it was definitely... it was definitely a good deal. Um, but, yeah, after the first year I wanted to come back retreading as long as I could.

SG How was it being a retread and working with the regular jumpers? Did you feel as qualified as they did and well trained?

JK Oh, yeah, definitely, and, in those days, you know, early on my knees were good and I never had to run or anything before I came back to retread, I'd go out and I'd do a qualification run, usually... I was usually right in the pack. I was never one to have to smoke the crowd or anything I used to like to hang around [laughs], you know, have a good time. But, ah, there were... there were times when the real jumpers would go, "Hey, this guy's porky." And in the retread program we had some people return who weren't in the best physical condition... that probably shouldn't have returned and because of those we took some flack... because of those few, there were a few, we took some flack from the other bases, but they should have been called out. There should have been no two ways about it, ah, they should have been called out, and maintain the program with the other bases. Because we had some pretty doggone top notch... you take a jumper that goes into the program with three, four years of experience and after ten years, you know, a guy with thirteen, fourteen years fire experience and you've got a pretty good hand. You know they can use any piece of equipment on the fire, you know, pumps and saws and this and that and the other, they're... most of us, the older retreads were... sector boss and division boss qualified, and so, retreading was really somewhat of a vacation. But I think the Forest Service got the bang for their buck, they got their money's worth no two ways about it. They could slam line as a crew, um, on two manners we'd go in, do a job, and then you knew that son of a gun was done right, didn't have to worry.

SG So after you came back that second year you came to the retread program. Can you tell me a little bit about some of your progression through those years as a jumper, ah, interesting fire scenes that happened to you, ah, your advancement, getting to be a spotter and squad leader?

JK Yeah, Most of the stuff as far as advancement in the jumpers and in the jumper hierarchy, I was more interested in my advancement as a district employee and so I really didn't particularly care to get into the hierarchy of the jumper
organization. Didn't even... in fact it didn't even enter my mind. I was happy as a retread. What I'd do is... oh, since I was versed in helitac, um, I think I used to contribute a lot on cutting helispots and helping load gear and stuff like that. I'd take a crew once and awhile and head up the crew if we had a crew action. Otherwise most of the work that I did around the base was just like any poge would do, which was really great, it was a lot of fun. Because, you know, you... like I was a prevention officer back on the district, had a lot of responsibility supervising people, phone rings, get in the plane head for Redding, get in the plane head for Redding, you could be a nerd again [laughs] you act like you were completely lobotomized around there, you know, wake me up when it's time to jump [laughs].

SG You sound like you had a lot of fun when you were working.

JK Oh, yeah, I always have. I had a lot of fun jumping. There was a lot of opportunity to have fun jumping, there were a lot of people that liked having fun, liked working, liked playing, and you get a bunch of people like that together, and it's a pretty good combination.

SG Any fires that stick out in your head during that period?

JK You know, probably as far as one that I remember most is probably my last fire jump, that was the virgin fire on the Shasta T, on the Big Bar District. It was a crew action and the thing was booking pretty good when we got there, had a real nice meadow to jump in. Everybody but two guys made the meadow, and when I started hiking back to the meadow [laughs] after I landed... you know, there was a reason why... there was a good reason I didn't... I didn't [laughs]. Mike Madden, and Madden was one of these hard luck guys, all right it seemed Madden never really has had things go for him, never has, and tries, my God he tries, and he's really serious and I mean like he paces a lot and he... and he gets really tight, but nothing goes for him. Anyway Madden jumps and he's right before me, the stick before me, jumps the Otter. You know, it's pretty hard to get bad body position going out of an Otter. Anyway old Madden, the last thing I see of him when he leaves the plane are just the toes of his boots hanging on the sill of the door going... going... or the sill of the step going off the step... he just took and he fell straight... anyway he had this Mae West and he takes and he messes around with it for awhile and decides to pop his reserve, pops his reserve and, of course, he's got a legitimate squak for drifting out past the meadow. I think the next stick... yeah, it was the next stick... because when I went over Madden he was getting out of his... I come out and I hang in the convection... I get in the convection column... and this was... it was the only time in all those years that this ever happened to me, but I hit in the convection column and... and I'm looking at the ground and I'm not getting any closer, in fact I think I was going up a couple of times. But anyway I'm not getting any closer to the
ground so I turn into the wind but I'm still drifting backwards a little bit. Well the plane when he dumped us out I was the last... I was in the last stick because he went out behind the ridge and he had to come through the saddle to dump his cargo. Well he comes through the saddle... and I talked to the pilot later and he goes "God I looked up" and he says "you were right where we dumped you out, so I had to peel off." So he goes through the saddle again, comes through and I'm still there. I was like four and a half minutes... four and a half minutes in the air. Anyway I drift out past... and where I landed the fire comes booking through there and I had to cut the lines off my chute and get all my gear before it burnt up... had to... had to scramble out of it because it was... it was hauling, really hauling. But that was a good fire, whole bunch of things happened, it was my last fire jump and... and, ah, it was... it was a barn burner, and, ah, ah, so I remember it a lot.

SG When you say a whole bunch of things happened did the things happen on the fire or what?

JK Oh, just things like we... you know, we put a lot of line in... worked hard put a lot of line in, it was just a fun fire, yeah.

SG During those years do you remember a lot of changes in the jumpers and between the jumpers and the older men, or changes among the jumpers. I know you... the retread program was there the whole time?

JK Yeah, yeah, ah, equipment... there was changes in equipment. The overhead, ah, I saw... let me see... you know, I saw a change where they went from foresters to technicians which was a positive for me it was a positive stroke. But they may have lost something in the process and the foresters have a network between themselves and I think that some of that buying and ownership kind of comes in within that network. I don't know what they do... whether they do... get the hi fi's when they meet one another or something but anyway it... it's there. And, ah... and, ah, Tracy and Gramps, both top notch jumpers, ah, but the program hasn't... the program like the retreads and stuff like that went by the wayside... I think... well the retreads went by the wayside. But, you know, it's Tracy and Tracy was gone. And I think we lost some stuff and I think those were some changes and basically what the change was as I see it we went from foresters, McDonald and Nelson, to technicians with Richard and Gary, but in the process lost a pretty positive program. Gained some darn good jumpers, we have a darn good program... there's a good program that exists there now, but those are some of the trade offs I think that's happened.

SG So Dave Black left?

JK Black left?

SG Dave Black, as he, left then suddenly it was changed into
technicians?

JK Dave Nelson came. Dave... Dave was a forester also. Mack was there, went to... what was the name of that... oh, he went to the Klamath as forest F.M.O.. Dave Nelson who was a forester on the Tahoe came and then he left as district ranger on the San Bernadino, on one of the districts of the San Bernadino. And then after Dave then Tracy came, Richard came up from Silver City I think. And like I say I think that those things I saw organizationally in the heirarchy... organizationally those things changed and then the result of it we lost the retread program and so forth and went more to full time jumpers that type of thing.

SG How did that reflect on you as jumpers? Do you remember feeling any effects of that change?

JK Well see when they... one of the things with the retread program... with the retread... when they did away with that was the last year I could have retreaded anyway. It just worked out that way. So I just kind of went "well, geez, you know, it's too bad" but I didn't fall over and make a big deal out of it.

SG You said before you think you might like to go back and be a jumper again.

JK It's kind of... yeah, it's one of those fantasy things, maybe it's something that helps me keep weight of and it... it, ah, especially here I... with a pile of paper, and I look at the activity calendar and I think of the benefits of this job versus that job and... and, ah, sure would like to... sure would like to go back.

SG What kind of benefits do you get from jumping?

JK What benefits?

SG What are your benefits?

JK There not monetary, um, but the personal benefits are that I just feel good when I'm jumping, it's a feeling of accomplishment. Again you meet... you meet the Japanese guy and have a beer, you know, that type of thing that's important to me. I like the work. I like being out. I like hard work. I like taxing myself physically and mentally. But, you know, there's a feeling of accomplishment. I like being around aircraft. I like being around the kind of people who jump. I like being around the kind of people who fly airplanes. I guess that's it.

SG O.K. If someone came up to you and asked you what kind of a person can become a jumper, and say they were interested in getting into the jump program would you have any kind of advice for them?

JK Yeah, yeah, um, I remember a school teacher that I had when
I was a kid, he used to have a saying is that you gotta wanna. And I think that you gotta wanna, that... that's one thing. Um, you... to be a jumper... to be a jumper you have got to... you've got to like it... you've got to have a feel for, out in the Marshalls or out in the Marbles or you got to have out in the Glass and Front country, you've got to like the outdoors, I think you have to like... you have to like yourself, you have to like other people, you've got to have trust in other people. You've got to be disciplined, you've got to like hard work, you've got to like long hours, and you've got to tolerate short rations, you've got to... I think you have to have fun, I think you got to... basically you have to be a person who has fun, maybe not all the time, but at... you... you have to enjoy the job, you have to enjoy the people who are in it. Um, it... once in a great while I'd see a person come into the program and I can't remember their name. I can't remember their face even, but they'd come into the program and then they'd be gone because they... they didn't understand some of those of those elements. And I think those are some... there are a whole bunch of things that come into it, and then for individuals there are certain things that mean more than others of course. But for me, um, it beat the hell out of walking [laughs], it, ah... it, ah, um... I got a lot of satisfaction out... out of the job... I... I'm still one if I come in grubby, smelling like smoke I feel good... I feel good with myself, I feel good with other... other people. Um, my... my family, ah, says that now "all right," you know, "the old man's coming home with... grungy and everything he's going to slam down a beer, you know, and go 'man did I have a good time today'." I can whip out 40 pounds of paper in here and come home schizo, you know, but jumping never feels schizo, you never... never once did I come home bummed out about something.

SG Is there any way now that you can get those feelings again doing other kinds of things?

JK No, no It's a, you know, without being dramatic about something I... I think I was a once... that's a once in a lifetime experience.

SG But you're going to try it again some day?

JK Hum, I don't know, ah, it's nice to... it's nice to dream but I don't know.

SG Hum, well and the... I think they've lifted the age restriction, so long as you're over I think 60 [laughs] you do O.K.

JK [laughs] Oh, yeah, no I'd do O.K., I know I can still, ah, operate a pulaski, it doesn't take a hell of a lot of brain power yet. But, ah, no the main that's... you know, it's the physical... it's the physical thing. One... you know, a lot... you know, and the old adage says you never can go back home. Maybe you can't... maybe you can't go back home, but it'd sure be fun to try... it'd sure be fun to try. But, you know, I talk
here... I got a phone call from a guy, Dick Calkins down in Los Padres... what was it in May, I think it was in May... and he said "hey, happy"... and if you want to hear somebody who can tell some stories it's him... "happy anniversary." I go "what?" "It was 20 years ago today." Yeah, yeah, and, ah, he, ah... and I said "by golly, it was." And he goes "you know" he says "I was just sitting here thinking that 20 years ago today we started jumping together." And he, ah, he'd gotten on the phone and was calling some of the old guys around, you know.

SG So do you get together with a lot of old friends from jumping?

JK Yeah, we call or see one another on fires and stuff like that. You can always tell the Salamander and fire camps and the old jumpers are hunkered around it telling lies, "remember the time...," you know.

SG Lots of stories.

JK Oh, yeah, a lot of stories.

SG Is there anything special that you feel personally you'd like to say about smokejumping that you haven't said or feel like there's anything...?

JK No, no, except, you know... except it... it was a good job, it was a darn good job, maybe even a little more than a job. Um, and, ah, met some good people. Ah, I think, ah, ah, I feel good about having done a pretty good job for the Forest Service over that length of time, and I think the Forest Service got their money's worth, and I sure as hell got my money's worth. Ah, ah, didn't drive a fancy car or anything but sure had a good time [laughs].

SG I guess.

JK Yeah.

SG Just also, just looking around at from another perspective the Viet Nam War was going on at that time, did that have any effect that you felt, you know, that was noticeable on the jumper organization?

JK Um uh, no, my, ah... I think my, ah, where I came from as far as, you know, a lot of things were happening during Nam and my age and everything I'm probably prime for being involved in... in, you know, in one... either right or left... either to the right or to the left of... of, ah... politically of what was going on in the Viet Nam era especially, you know, early. Probably the jumpers... we never really got involved too much. You know, some of the guys went, served their time, came back, nobody did a hell of a lot of talking about it then though, not in our group... didn't do too much talking politically. Politically as a group we were all pretty much to the left, but
then back in those days everybody was to the left it seemed like [laughs]. Um, but... but nobody, ah... no one did a heck of a lot of talking about it, guys went over, did their thing, came home.

SG Were many of the jumpers vets, Viet Nam vets, at particular period?

JK Well, let me see... some of the guys went over worked for Air America... some of the guys worked for Air America.

SG So some of the jumpers were coming from Air America?

JK No, had worked for them. Yeah, who was it... let me see... Billy Boles... Boles went over and worked for them... it seemed like somebody else... I know Mick Swift... did you ever hear of Mick Swift?

SG No.

JK Oh, that's another person that you should... you... I think Mick's a district fire management officer on the... like Siyuselaw or Siske up in Oregon now. He's another one that my God is... you know, was in the program for years, top notch guy. Ah, Billy Boles... Bill works, ah, for... for, ah, B.L.M. in Fairbanks. But the Viet Nam vet that sticks in my mind is Chris Christophers. Chris poged in '64, and... let me see when did he go '66... seemed like he got his masters... he was working on his master degree and, ah... went to Nam and came home, tried to get a... he was... I hired him as a hot-shot superintendent like in '75 on the Tahoe, tried to get a job in personnel with the Forest Service, but the Forest Service wouldn't hire him at the 7 level, and so he went to work for the Department of Defense over Mare Island and I think he's a 12 now or something [laughs]. But... but anyway, yeah, Chris was over in... lives somewhere over in the Bay area. But he, ah, with the... from the '64 group at least he went to Nam. But anyway as far as other... ah, a lot of talking and a lot of effect, but I don't think it had any more on us than it did on anybody else... not our group... we just didn't do a heck of a lot of talk about it. I think we... as a group we probably change as much as the country is changing, had some pretty definite views as a group and as time progressed those views changed and as a group we probably changed.

SG So when you went out socially together in the evenings or anything you never really talked much about it?

JK No, huh uh, no, you know, like I say no more than I don't think anybody else did.

SG Well... well that's good.

JK Have you got... have some of the bases or some of the people said "yeah, it really effected?"
SG No, no, people have said that for the most part jumping seemed to override a lot of the outside political events that were happening at that time.

JK Yeah, yeah, I think that's one of... some of the deals that's made... some of deals that's made with a group such as jumpers... a group of jumpers is some of those social, political, religious things don't come up... they don't come up. You may have them, you may be aware of them, how a person feels, but you don't talk about it that much. The jumpers themselves don't. Sometimes the overhead do... sometimes the overhead take a real hard... one takes a left or a right political standpoint and they get up and everybody laughs at them, boos and hoots, you know, shoots rubber bands at them and they sit back down. But... but, ah, most of all the troops don't care about that. They've got a job to do and they don't worry about what the other person is politically.

SG O.K., well anything else you can think you want to add?

JK No, but then I said no 20 minutes ago [laughs].

SG I asked you another question [laughs].

JK No, I think that pretty well covers it. I think in the questionnaire that I... I was... on some of the things I was groping around for answers to them. I don't know if I contributed anything or not.

SG Oh, you've contributed fully [laughs].

END OF INTERVIEW