
BB [Inaudible]... who jumped from 1946 to 1947 on July 22, 1984 for the Smokejumper Oral History Project.

[INTERUPTION]

BB Um, I'd just like to make sure I this right. You jumped from 1946 to 1947?

RM That's correct.

BB Do you have any other prior Forest Service work history?

RM No.

BB Any other history prior to jumping?

RM Just ah, Air Corp... when I came from the Air Corp. And I started to school in Pullman, Washington, under pre-veterinary medicine. Then I had a chance to go to job at deep sea salvage crew, so I thought that would be good for a summer job. I came back to Homedale and Ken Roth who was flying for the Forest Service now... I talked to Kenny and says, (Kenny'd just come out of the Navy) "Let's go deep sea diving over there. You got a good job... big wages." All right. We started up from Homedale. As we're coming through McCall we saw a sign there; "Smokejumpers". "Well Kenny what the dickens is a Smokejumper?" He didn't know, so we turned in there and I says, "Hey," I says... "We talked in there and we'd kind of like to join this outfit if we could?" And he says, "Well, they got the first bunch in Missoula... we'll call up there and see if they're taking a second bunch and if you want to wait, why, we'll give you a call if we can take you." "Fine." We waited about a week and they called us. "You guys come up... get up to Missoula and you can train with that bunch up there." So, I called up the school and... at Pullman, and told them that Kenny and I weren't coming deep sea diving... "We're going to go to Smokejumpers." And so we started training here in Missoula in 1946. Art Cochran [Arthur M.] was with us at that... was our head man at that time.

BB Your head man at Missoula?

RM At Missoula, yep.

BB He was your training officer?

RM He was... yeah. We knew of Cooley [Earl] but I just didn't uh... Art was our head man and we were here for a short while so that's the reason I didn't become well acquainted with Cooley.

BB So, you were... you say you were in the Air Corp. What years were you in the Air Corp?
RM In '44 and '45.

BB And then you got out and you went to Pullman?

RM Mm, hm.

BB And then you got your summer job.

RM [Inaudible]... And, uh... went there, back to Pullman, and came back to the Smokejumpers again. By that time, why, they needed five steady men. I thought that was quite the thing. Five steady men and I had a chance to be one of them! To me that was pretty good... so, I quit school and went with the Smokejumpers.

BB By steady mean... mean, you mean full-timer?

RM Yup... and we worked on through the winter and... in the loft, and then the spring we worked in the highlines. Kenny and I and we thought that was... I don't know what you'd call it, but oh, quite a thing when they asked us to stay steady, you know.

BB What year was that then... when you were asked to be steady?

RM '47... Well it was the end of '46. We stayed in '47 and then I went back to farming. My dad was, ah... had, ah... was sick so I went back to help farming.

BB Where were you stationed at?

RM After we left Missoula, we went right down to McCall in '46. Then the next year we started the school in McCall. So that's where we taught the rest of Smokejumpers when they came. We had the school there in McCall from '47 on... That is the last time I had gotten into Missoula. We trained up Nine Mile out here, but Missoula, just got a real soft spot in my heart for it. It was a wonderful place... I really enjoyed it, yeah.

BB Why don't you tell me a little that training at Nine Mile.

RM Well, I guess, ah... I don't know how many people remember it but I was known in the... for a little while there as "The Great Horse Caller". And how that happened... Cochran took a bunch of us... I don't remember how many but, I think that group was probably 50 or 70, it seems like to me. Forest Service in that time had a lot of horses and mules over there. Before the war my folks were sheep people and we had horses and I learned to make a call like a horse. Of course not many people even knew that... hardly Kenny... I don't know if Kenny knew that. So we were packing our packs and I saw these mules out there in the mountains a little ways there and I knew there was a few animals there and I said, "Hey you guys want a ride?" "Yeah." I says, "Just a minute, I'll call those horses over there." "Aw, baloney. You can't do that." "Sure." So I give that call... it
sounds like a horse you know... and mules, when they hear a call like that, (it's more of a colt's call), they really become excited. They're protective of a colt, you know. By golly. So I give that call about three times... even I don't know where all those horses and mules came from! We had them all running right next to us... so I become "The Great Horse Caller"! [Laugh]

BB Can you still do that call?

RM Yeah, I think I can. I haven't tried it in a long time... I don't know if I could or not?

BB Want to try?

RM I don't know if we'd wake up everybody around here... ready for this? [Laugh]. [Tries to do call]. Can't make it, by gum. [Does call]. I can't do it now. [Laughs].

BB That's good. That's good.

RM But when I could do it then, it be so clear. It go a long ways. Of course, you know all the meeting to this... we've seen these people today... I can hardly talk... I'm hoarse... so I can't make that call. [Laughs].

BB You did good! You did really good... I think so! Who did you train with?

RM Kenny, ah... you mean my buddies?

BB Yeah.

RM Kenny Roth, and ah... was the only... we were the only two from McCall that year... ah, second group. The rest of McCall guys had all trained in the first group so we were the only two McCall boys to train in that ah, ah...

BB At Nine Mile?

RM That's... that's all I remember.

BB OK. Tell me a little bit more about the training... what kind of things did they make you do?

RM Well, that was good training. That was good in for anybody. The first thing is conditioning, and I like that. When you're in condition to do something, you can do it. If you're not in condition, you're lost right off there... right away. But they had a good program here at Nine Mile... got us in training just like, ah... that's the reason we couldn't ride those horses... we should have been in training and that wouldn't have been right either to ride those animals. Anyhow, why... they had a good program here, and when we back to McCall we made, ah... the training school there, just a small one. The main thing was to keep in condition. That was the first thing. Then schooling;
fighting fires... that was good because you had to know that. But in my opinion the first thing was conditioning.

BB What kind of things did you have to do to get into condition [Inaudible]?

RM Well, afterwards when we built a torture rack that was a good as any besides the obstacle course and the regular running... training and getting your wind and your muscles in shape. But the obstacle course was as good as... or I mean the ah... torture rack was as good as anything. That was a rack of pine poles maybe about eight inches thick... and placed probably about fifteen... fourteen, fifteen inches above the ground. Then you bend over backwards and continue... that hardens the muscles and, and ah... that helps to get you into shape. Running and the obstacle course and then... that's goodly for shape. Then your general wind is your track... But we also had some good ball teams up there. The smokejumpers had some good ball teams.

BB So you did baseball for recreation?

RM Yeah, baseball. And of course, we had a little bar recreation there, too. That was always good right after the war. We had some, ah... when it first started, we didn't have too many laws and their... governing us, you know. We just all come from the service, and some from the paratroopers, all different services and ah, it was soon learned that there had to be some pretty stiff regulations. For instance, we used to put...we thought... put hobnails in you boots, you know. Golly, we'd get into that old Ford, you know, and those hobnails would tear up the plyboard in there. We had no idea what... that at the time that it would be that way. And so it wasn't long before we got rid of those. And different regulations came in... which I think were good.

BB What kind of regulations were they... that you thought were good?

RM Oh, the best one is no drinking before you go on a fire. I think that's about the best regulation we had. You get that one covered, why... the rest of them are pretty well in mind... But no more hobnails, and, ah... outside of that, I think the regulations weren't stiff but they got a few things... oh, it's kind of hard to remember some of the safety things... precautions, you know. Because in those days we didn't seem to mind too much. I think we might have gone out there without a parachute in some cases, but you know they watch those things and give us regulations finally. Then we begin to straighten up a little bit. Kind of a rough bunch when we first there.

BB What was your fire training? What would that entail?

RM Fire training? Ah... we had some practice fires and of course, using the pulaski and the shovel and your different teams... like your shovel team and your pulaski team... and
digging your trails around the fire. Duff uncovering which is real important... you know something to learn... and I think that was great, it was good training! We even practiced ah... you know they'd set for a fire... a small fire and then go out there and practice putting it out. Good training.

BB Why don't you tell me a little bit about... it was like to make your first jump out of a plane?

RM Well, actually the first jump was probably my easiest... until... yeah, until later I begin to enjoy it. There's a little transition in there. The first time going out at Missoula ah... the way they build these up on from the jump racks, before you get to the airplane... the training... it really helps. Because you train, and you have the mock ups, and when you actually get in the airplane it wasn't too much different than your training. The only difference is the feet above the ground. That's the only difference in training, see. And so it wasn't too bad. But after that first opening shock, then you see something a little different. And the floating down and finding your parking place... it's just a little different. Then you begin to think a little bit. But my hardest jump was... when I packed my own chute... That was my hardest jump. I'd have traded anybody parachutes. [Laugh].

BB What happened?

RM Well, you had to pack you chute once and I ah, packed my own chute... my gosh, I packed this thing, and for some reason I would have traded anybody to jump his chute instead of my own. You know [laugh] it's just....

BB Did that scare you packing your own and then jumping?

RM That's the worst... yep... that's the worst one... jumping my own chute that I packed.

BB How'd it... how'd it go?

RM Fine. You bet. You know, we... we played hard and we worked hard. When it was time to work... we worked! When it was time we played... and we played in the same caliber... hard all the time. So, really, ah... when I packed my chute... I really knew it was OK. We kidded around, "Hey, God... you want to take my chute and I'll take yours?" You know, just for fun.

BB Tell me a little bit about your first fire jump then.

RM Well... the first fire jump... that's a little bit hard to remember, that first fire jump... but, ah... I begin to make a game of it after my third fire jump, I believe. From then on.... By making a game of it, I mean this way: It's a serious business when you're going on a fire and finding your spot, but, ah... and ah, I like to be serious on my work. The only thing is, I had thought afterwards; "I'll develop something else," as I
was going out... "I think I'll make this into kind of a game." And instead of just stepping on the step of that Ford, getting out, or the Travelaire, I began to use a little energy... push. When I got ready to jump, I'd scream when I go out there. When you scream and go out there and you're still watching the ground, then it becomes fun. Then there's something about it, I don't know what it is but it becomes a good game. You might miss your spot, you might hang up, or hit a tree... but it'll make you think a little bit, you know, on your landings. But from then on it was a game... I really enjoyed it.

BB So was it pretty exciting that first time going up and then flying over a fire and realizing that you're going to...?

RM Jump?

BB ... the whole thing is right in front of you?

RM Yeah. The main thing... the whole job... our job is to put fires out. We knew that. That's the whole thing. That's the result of what you have all done. But jumping for some reason, was the top of it. It was the, uh... I don't know whether it be the danger, or what it would be, but it was exciting. And we knew at the same time our job was really to get that fire out. But we got down and we worked hard when we got to the... got those fires out. The jumping was really... there was just some kind of glory to it, and I couldn't tell you why.

BB So, it was up real...?

RM It was. Yeah, always! But the same time down on the fires why, um... oh, we had a job to do down there and I think we really did the job well. Yeah, they're a... it's a breed of guys that come in there to have fun, they're exciting and it's great, but we had a job to do. And I think every man was in that outfit; when he got down there to do his job, he did it. And he did a good job, you know.

BB So... you... most of the men you jumped with then were vets?

RM Yes, ah... that's the thing. In this jump outfit when they come back, you have Navy men (I should say ex-Navy men); and ex-jumpers; Air Corp men; and uh... let's see... we had ah, people who were going to college for pre-medicine... and like myself... pre-veterinary medicine. Oh, we had a couple of guys from New York, and, ah... but the funny thing about it, the jumpers... I don't know how it is today, but when we got together... there's something... we had a tough name in a way, but there's somekind of brotherhood in that bunch in there. By golly, if somebody was in trouble, there's no doubt... no hesitation... we'd go in there and help them. And so I guess you'd call it kind of brotherhood, you know. The Smokejumpers, ah... well of course the Forest Service, too. I've always liked the Forest Service. Folks had sheep before the war and we were always going through park forests. For some reason... in my own mind, I've just loved the
forest and I like that Forest Service. And here I am working for them under the Smokejumpers.

BB So there's a real comradery between you and your buddies.

RM Yep. I don't know how it it today cause I haven't been amongst but ah... in those days there really was. There was just some togetherness... I don't know what it is... maybe it's the war or maybe it's the type of men coming in there, I just don't know but it was great!

BB Do you feel that there was a military attitude in your training?

RM Yes, ah... in fact, coming from the service into there, that was somewhat along their same line. But the Forest Service People, ah... I don't know whether there was something.... They were the Boss. But we understood that we working for somebody. I think during those military years, why, ah... then coming to this outfit, we still had the same thing... we had our bosses, we had a job to do, and we did them. We even volunteered once in a while. [Laugh]. Yes.

BB Do you think that helped overall?

RM The training in the service? I believe so. I believe it showed us that we had things to do and we had people who were over us, and we had to obey orders. I believe that helped a lot. But then on a second thought, too, maybe the rest of the boys that hadn't been during military service, came in and it might be the same with them. I... it's pretty hard to say, but I'll bet it is. They're the same type of people as we were just that we happened to be in the war years and ah, these are fellows coming up. I think they're just like us; spirited fellows. All I've noticed, see, in this trip coming in from this trip coming in from McCall... we talked to those boys over there and they're a good bunch of boys. Younger than we are [by] quite a bit you know, but it looks like about the same type of persons.

BB So what kind of person do you think it is... it takes to be a smokejumper?

RM Well, you got a point there. Like they said last night, ah... not exactly a little crazy, but I think it's, ah... people who like a little bit excitement and like to do something extra. Not just the plain old everyday thing. They like to do something extra... and, ah... it's something like that I believe.

BB Um, so you didn't have the chance to work with any CO's?

RM No. They ah... was the last outfit there in McCall that I know of and I didn't ah... I didn't even know what they were, to tell you the truth, for a long time... Conscientious Objectors. I'd never thought of them... never had seen them so... didn't come across them.
BB Never had to work with them... OK.

RM Well, we have some thoughts on those things but then you never know... we might have left some of those back in the hills. But you know, that's debatable I suppose. The Country is here and it's wonderful enough to live in here. I always think it's wonderful enough to fight for. And even now, there isn't one of old guys, if Uncle Sam needed us, we wouldn't go back... we'd go right in!

BB Tell me what an average day was like for you?

RM Oh, ah, we had duties, and the roster would come out what to do... which I think is good. Keep people busy, because when people aren't kept busy then things begin to happen that shouldn't happen. We had our squad leaders, and, uh... Lloyd Johnson was head of our outfit over there. The Forest Service at that time was Glenn Thompson. In fact, his brother Lavelle Thompson was here at the reunion here this year. But ah, we had a good organization, good people to run it. They kind of let us... they had regulations, but they kind of let us run our own outfit. We had a job to do and as long as we did it, things went well.

BB This was at McCall?

RM Um hm.

BB Lloyd... what was his last name?

RM Lloyd Johnson. He was the head of our outfit. Wayne Webb [Wayne R.] was our lock foreman. And then we had other boys coming in training and learning how to pack chutes and things like that. Myself... like, Kenny Roth and I, why, we went out on the highline. Ace Neilson [Arlid Neilson?] was out on the highline with us. Ace was another '46 man. We call him Ace... I'm not sure... the way I got that name for Ace Neilson, during the Navy, he was a Navy pilot, but he made five carrier landings so we called him Ace Neilson. He didn't get into actual combat [laugh], but that's where he got the name Ace.

BB Earlier you mentioned that you started a school at McCall, in '47.

RM Yes.

BB Ah, what... tell me a little bit about that school. What exactly was...?

RM Well, then we got what we call, ah... a lot of new fellows coming in there to McCall, and we "older fellows", (as I say, just for one year experience, we call them "older fellows") we were put as squad leaders and given jobs to, ah... for instance, we have brush pilers, for little while, while the other guys were
training. And then bring that bunch in to training and take the other bunch out and train on the fire practices. It really worked well. Those, ah... Lloyd Johnson had those jobs all lined up. That was his job to do that, and that's the way we were kept busy all the time. Then, the buildings... we didn't have many buildings over there... Ralph Wilde [Ralph E.] was the head plumber there, and we put the plumbings in on those buildings, and did a lot work while we were there... often till fire season began. Once fire season began, why, we had... we were kept fairly busy. Had a little time to play ball, earlier times, and if we didn't have time or the ball game was scheduled for a certain time, why, certain ball players were gone... we'd put somebody else in there and keep the games going also, see.

BB So, you didn't really have any project work?

RM Yes. Now those projects... now let's see I have to remember... the Highline was one project. And then during the winter those telephone lines would get put down by the snows so they'd send us out. And that's why, on the tour yesterday out there at the jumpers, I asked what size spurs they used on those climbers. And there's a reason for that. When they put me out there that first week with Kenny and Ace Neilson, they had given me a pair of pole climbers because we practiced climbing poles and pole climbers are shorter spurred... and I got big feet. Well, when we went out to the Highline, they had the spurs out there for us in there, and when I got mine I got the pole climbers, but the other boys had gotten what they call.... There's a middle one in there and I've forgot the name of that spur... but they were a little better, and they liked them quite well. When I started putting that Highline, I was so weak and scared by the end of the week, I burned... let's see... I think I burned the total of nine trees. And I was so nervous by Friday, my nose was bleeding and I didn't want to quit. I'd go up there and my nose was bleeding all over me. The spur was so small and that thick bark would kick out and I'd burn a tree. But I burned one of... quite a long ways. So by Friday at three o'clock when we were coming back from McCall, I wasn't a nervous wreck, but I was pretty close to it. And I grabbed those spurs and I brought them into McCall and went straight for the place we have our storage. I was just a little bit perturbed, too. Slapped those spurs on there and I said, "Give me the longest spurs you got!" And they gave me the extra long ones. I was happy ever since. They did a good job, yeah.

BB So, by burning a tree, means sliding down because you couldn't stay on?

RM Oh, that's right. Yeah, I forgot. You hook it in there, as you're climbing the tree. And when you're getting up there you're hooked to a safety belt and you're putting a wire... Some of those trees were pretty close to 90 feet. And, so... I didn't burn one that far, but you know, when you're up there, your knees are shaking, that spur is going to kick out. That's a long ways down without a parachute. And so... when I got those long spurs,
I never burned another tree. I was right at home with them. Didn't bother me a bit. And so, that's the reason yesterday I asked over there, "What size ah, of spurs you got on those?" And they do have a pretty good spur that they use for the bark. Too long of a spur, they claim, will... may hurt the tree a little and that's true, but I still like those long ones. [Laugh].

BB I can see why. So, you were saying earlier, you used to... part... also your recreation was going out after training. What did you do after hours?

RM Well, that's a funny thing. Now, this is a great thing about McCall... we had a nice lake around there... resort area. And we'd go downtown and we'd drink our beer or whiskey, and played cards. At that time there was gambling in McCall. We gambled too. The thing where I think we missed the boat, and that was a strange thing, too; all the guys in town... we had a lot of tourists come here. And a lot of good looking girls would come up, you know, and the chance to take them out and go swimming.... Well, I never was a good swimmer... I could swim if I had too but instead of going out up the beach with all the girls and everything, we'd be in there drinking beer and playing cards. Now that's a strange thing. But when we did go on a date, then we were a gentleman and we went out on a date. But you'd think that, by gosh, that's what we should be doing, young guys there. But for some reason Kenny Roth, Ace Neilson, and us guys were all the same type of people and we'd be in there playing cards while all the town boys had their girls out on the beaches. [Laugh].

BB So, did you ever... did you get into any kind of trouble?

RM No. Never been in jail in my life and, in fact, we're... right now I'm still on law enforcement down in Owyhee County. We help them quite a bit, the sheriff's office, because they have so few men in such a big territory. So, we do help them a lot. As a jumper, well we had a few scraps, yes. But that wasn't too much trouble. You get against a man there, you use your dukes and that's it. If he was a better man he whipped you and he picked you up or you picked him up... shook hands with him and went in and had another drink. But we didn't use chains or knives or anything. We fought to see who was the better man, and you find out who the better man is, by golly, you get up... a little bloody, all messed up... a little bloody or something like that, you shook hands with him, slapped him on the back and away you'd go again. That was... it was a good life... it was kind of a brotherhood there, too. Yeah. But in trouble? Not much trouble. We didn't give the enforce... the law enforcement hardly any trouble. It was just amongst different people, you see and somebody you didn't like, or something like that.

BB While you were training did you feel that you had to prove yourself at any time?

RM Oh, I never have stopped that, and I don't know why. It's
still here... I'm 60 years old and, by gosh, still trying to prove myself. Why? But there's one thing about it, I learned something. If you give your best, whatever you're doing, the best you can do, that's proof enough right there. That's good enough. Because you can't win them all and as long as you feel you've done your best like a man, that's good enough in this world. You bet. That goes for a girl or a boy. [Laugh].

BB So, I want to hear more about what it was like up in that airplane. What was the atmosphere amongst you, when you were in that plane?

RM Well, it's quite a thing. When you're up there and you talk to each other, and maybe some guys are going into a bad spill... or a bad place you know, rocks or something, you always joke. We're always joking. I don't know... it's a funny thing, you go into there... you always do joke. I don't know whether it covers up fears or anything but the... I never really did have any fears of any sort, but every man is going to go out there and do the best he could. Actually, I always liked to watch the timber in those flights, so I don't think I really ever thought very much of anything except talk with them. I enjoyed myself, whether I was in the airplane, going down, or after we got on the fire. It just seemed, ah... it was work, but we had a good time too.

BB So, overall, most of the men you jumped with didn't have too much trouble?

RM No. I guess you'd call devil may care attitude and happy go lucky attitude of some sort, you know. But it was always good. I never found any bad feelings, or.... Oh, I heard maybe somebody had some fears getting out, but I had never seen it myself. The only thing... one incidence I do remember. We had a preachers son, a ministers boy, came up there and he was about six foot. In fact we call him Tall. He was a fine man, and a young man, come up there, but he wasn't a drinker and that type, but before he left in that season, he'd learned quite a bit. He swore and he drank a little bit. The first party we took him out on, ah... he got in the doorway and I was behind him. He had never drank before but that's the first time we had him out there, and he got sick just before he went out the door. He filled his face mask and then the wind blew it back right into me... that kind of turned my stomach a little bit. As funny as it was, it still turned my stomach a little bit. [Laugh].

BB Did he make it down OK?

RM He did just fine... but he didn't come back any more.

BB He quit then?

RM Yeah, that was the last year for him. [Laugh]. I think back... you know I kind of think, well... we think, "Ah, his dad must have got a hold of him after he learned what language he's using." And so on. It wasn't that bad, you know, but I really
think, seriously, that he probably just went on to other work. That's it. Yeah.

BB  So, what kind of plane did you mostly jump out of?

RM  The Ford and the Travelaire. I didn't get a chance to jump out of any other airplane. And Bob Fogg flew the, ah... he was, I think, about one of the best Travelaire pilots I... that ever came.

BB  What's his name?

RM  Bob Fogg... and Jim Larkin who is one of the finest pilots in the world, you won't find them any better. By the way, Jim Larkin is the one who instructed Kenny Roth. We were two jumpers at the time and Jim Larkin instructed Kenny. And Kenny turned out to be in my mind... just about the finest pilot in, ah... I was going to say the northwest, but I'd say the world.

BB  So, do you think your jumping has a lot to do with the pilot?

RM  Oh, yes! Ah, you know when we trained in here, there was a fine man up here, Penn Stohr. Penn Stohr was killed up here in Missoula someplace. I don't remember the year. But I happened to be flying with him most the time when he jumped us, and he was just like an old mother goose. He watched us all. And all the pilots of the same caliber... they always after the pilots... I mean, after the jumpers, see. They took care of us and they did everything they could to make it easy on us. It was just something between us, and we all liked each other. It was great.

BB  Penn Stohr... what happened to him?

RM  I think ah... I don't know where Penn got into a down draft or what happened. We were talking about that last night. I don't remember which crash, but he was killed in this area here.

BB  Do you know about what year that was?

RM  Oh, gosh... ah... no. I can't remember what year. It's hard to remember that, but, ah... that was the only time I had known Penn. He seemed to be a fine person and then we went to McCall so I never did see Penn, since then.

BB  What about your spotters? Were they important to you?

RM  Real important! In fact we really learned to do our own spotting. Those spotters had quite a job, but they were good. Smokey Stover... Wayne Webb spotted a lot. We had one of the older fellows, ah... a fellow called... named... he was Dale Fickle [Dale M.]. He had worked for the Forest Service, but he hit 40 years of age... I remember and I think that was in 1947 that they weren't going to let him jump anymore, but they got a, um... some kind of, ah... oh, I don't know what you'd call it...
not a permit or something, but they let him go back to jumping. He was the oldest of us all... Wonderful spotter, a good jumper and he took care of us. In fact we were trapped for five and a half hours, and I was trying to think of the name of that mount... ah, fire. Now these fires, had we kept track of them... wrote it down, it would have been great. But, ah... Ace Neilson has done that. Kenny Roth and I, we were never that type to keep records, you know. We should have. Probably write a book then. I learned there, where we were coming out... we had an injured jumper. Oh, I think it wasn't a bad injury, but we could have made it out of this fire. Dale says, "OK, lets make a run for it before it crowns. I think we can make it." We started out on the run and had out pulaskies in hand. By golly, we got out there. Pretty quick I heard somebody holler, "Can't make it. Can't make it." I'll never forget that. We all stopped... there was eight of us on that deal there, and, ah... one man couldn't make it. We all turned back and went back to get him, and he was having a tough time. About that time the... we were sitting down, resting... figuring this out. Dale says, "Now we'd better try again. We can still make it." We took out of there and we took off on the run... trying to go sideways and kind of downhill. "I can't make it. I can't make it." [feebly]. By golly, we all turned around and went back and got him. And Dale says, "I'll tell you what we got to do..." The fire was coming... and I had never been covered by a fire before. I'd never heard that roar. But this was an education. We went back and got him, and then Dale says, "The only thing we can do..." we knew the fire was coming, [and that] we'd better not run any farther because we was going to get caught in that thing, in the green. Dale says, "Let's go back into this burned area, right here where it's still burning in that one spot." He says, "Put a tree to your back and let's stay there." Which we did. We went down into that burned area... of course, it was hot and I'll tell you... and you couldn't see too much there... you know, the smoke was around and these ashes were flying around. So I remember I put my head against the one tree and my helmet.... Now speaking of those helmets; they asked yesterday, "When did the helmets come in?" Well, I don't know how it come, but we had them in McCall. Those steel helmets, you know, they're light. I had mine painted special... I don't know who got my helmet later on but it was a special paint job on there. But we put those helmets right on our head, put a tree to our back, and just covered our faces. Then when that fire crowned... I never heard anything like it in my life. Trees would explode just like dynamite, and some trees were falling. I didn't see where any tree fell close to us but you could hear them; "Ka-woomp!" You know. And that's the way they would fall. That roar was so great in there, you couldn't talk. It was a terrific roar... I never heard anything like it. The heat was terrific. The wind was terrific in there, and you couldn't even open you eyes because you'd get everything blown into them. So we just stayed there... buckled my knees up, put my head down and we waited. Sparks burning your shirt, your levi's and everything. I don't remember how long we waited in that place, but then soon, why, that roar was gone. It was gone up the hill. Ashes were oh, six
inches deep, it seemed to me as I remember. Hot! We looked up and there was still a lot of smoke right there, but the fire had gone over us. Then we began to walk out and walking out in that hot stuff... we figured we was pretty lucky and we made it back home. Yeah... Quite an education.

BB Do you remember who was with you on that fire?

RM I know Dale Fickle was leading us, and, ah... I wish I had kept track of the man that had the sprained ankle but I can't remember. I can't remember the name of that fire but, ah...

BB Do you know what area it was in?

RM Oh, gosh... I'll tell you the one reason probably I don't remember; we just took it as it came. It was another fire we went out to do... to finish the job, and we were ready for the next one. It didn't mean so much and it's too bad. It's too bad we didn't keep records of those things, but it was just another incidence, see. So we're on ready for the next one, and that's too bad that I couldn't remember the exact things like that, but I do remember our squad leader, Dale Fickle. That's what I remember about that.

BB So, you were pretty close to being injured then?

RM Oh, I suppose you call that close, but then a lot of other things have come close so we disregarded that. The only injury I received was on a fire that... it was over in the Council area, or Hell's Canyon... I can't remember which. Kenny Roth, Ace Neilson, they jumped on the same pass. It was a... small fires. And, um... I was trying to remember who's my partner there. By gosh, I think it was Bob Caldwell [Robert] and, ah... it was just a tiny fire, just about one tree is all it was. Kenny Roth was hurt this same day. It was quite a coincidence, I'll have to tell you about that. We bailed out and we got down on our fire and then, ah... Kenny and Ace went on the other. Just two men, you see. Two man fire, is what I'm saying. We got down... the Ranger had met us down there and just one tree burning. A lightning strike and it was quite up there high, the burn was, but as we looked at that it was nearly burned in two. And we had a crosscut saw, they dropped a crosscut saw to us, and so the Ranger says, "Well, if you boys saw that tree down, then we can get that fire out. I'll stand..." It was a steep hill, they were quite steep. He says, "I'll stand up here and if that top breaks out I'll holler." Fine. So I was on one end. I was on the left side of that saw and we began sawing that tree. Well the vibration, I think, helped break that... snap that piece... the pine top off. The Ranger yelled, "Run!" and I don't know what I was thinking about... I wanted to save that saw also. I wanted to save everything I could get anyhow... I've been that way all my life... so, I grabbed the saw and yanked it out. The hill was so steep, the edge of the saw turned up... that's why I got this scar here, it cut that vein clear through in there. By golly, that tree top fell right where the other boy was, on his
side right next to me. So, it was lucky. Except that I had the saw there, and well... the Rangers come down... I was bleeding quite badly. So we wrapped it up with a handkerchief and there’s no way to tell anybody... we didn't have the radio or anything. So, we just packed up and I held my right arm up. That's what I did you know, to keep from bleeding as much. I went out there till we got to the pickup down there that was to pick us up. Kenny Roth, when he jumped on the other fire, the same day... he had split his hand and right between the little finger and the next finger. And anyhow, of course, we didn't know this. Well they brought us back from McCall... the doctor's name was Doc Holliday... or Hawkins... (This is a long time, I can't quite remember these) But when we got there I come in there, by gosh here comes the pickup with Kenny. I say, "You hurt too, Kenny?" "Yeah." Gosh, we both there and all we'd done, just put some bandages on see. So Dr. Hawkin's took me first and ah, without even deadening the pain in that vein in there, he stuck a hook in there to put this ah, oh, stitches... looked like a fish hook. Gosh, there I was... he's sticking through my skin and boy, my toes were curling but I didn't want to holler because Kenny was there, see. So, we didn't... he sewed me up and that vein... he tied that vein off... it is no good anymore. But he tied it off and, ah... so then I began... I was going to wait for Kenny... and oh boy, that was a toughy. You know the skin is tough in you hand... and that old fish hook... the same one he used on me, he used on Kenny but he couldn't penetrate the tough skin where the callouses are. Gosh! And no deadening. Kenny never made a sound either but boy, didn't we sweat while we sat there. When we got out of there, the first place we hit was the bar [laugh] to have a drink. But boy, that Doc Hawkins... well he did a job on Max Glaves... Max was with us today too. Max broke an ankle, and the bones in his legs and Hawkins put it into a cast. It was injured... Max was feeling so much pain when the leg swole [sic] up we called that doctor back. And the doctor came and took a look at it, and he says, "Yeah," he says... he was smoking a cigar, ashes were kind of falling out... "Yeah, it looks kind of tough." He says, "Well, maybe we'd better do something about it." Max told him, "Well do something." He says, "Cut that thing off." So, Dr. Hawkins got out that... I don't know whether it was a scalpel knife or what it was for doing the cutting, and ah, Ace... or, Max told him, "Be awful careful Doc, my leg's under there." He didn't... he sunk that scalpel into Max's leg, I think just about a half inch deep... [laugh] and made Max so mad... he said a few words to the Doc to finish getting the cast off then Max didn't turn out good.

[END OF SIDE A]

[SIDE B]

BB We were talking a little bit about Doc Hawkins. What fire... do you remember the names of the fire that you got hurt on, or Kenny got hurt on?

RM I was trying to remember that fire... I think, ah.... Gosh,
no, I can't remember the name of those... that fire that Kenny and Ace, and Caldwell and I got on, and we both got hurt the same day. But I can't remember that fire. I will say something... the methods about the doctors... they sure have improved now. [Laugh].

BB  It sounds like it.

RM  Oh, yes.

BB  Do you remember the Ranger's name by any chance?

RM  Ah, Ranger at the Council Area, I think, was Youngblood. He was a fine person. In fact, his boy even went on through the Forest Service, but I believe that was Youngblood over there. Yes, because we went to his area, so it had to be right in that Council... from that Council Area.

BB  Do you have any other times that you got injured or...?

RM  Well, not injured. Had some close ones. For instance, it seems Ace Neilson and I are always jumping close together. Ken Roth... of course Kenny was a good commander all the time. But you know, once in a while, coming down, you do have collisions. I have walked over a chute... of Bob Gossett's [Robert M.] on one fire. It wasn't too bad because as I came across my chute didn't lose wind... I was above Bob. And it wasn't a bad walk, but, uh... it's about as soft as a walk as I've ever made. I don't think I sank more than six inches in his canopy as I was going across, and then of course we joked and laughed about it. The one that could have been a good one was with Ace Neilson... when I jumped out, I was above Ace and somehow I come across him and his chute took the air from mine. Well, when my chute collapsed, I was going down... I went inside his lines. And I could remember... I remember seeing that chute as I... I don't remember seeing Ace below me, I was in his lines, but I could watch my own chute coming from the top of his and began to catch wind. As it caught the air, it dragged me out sideways, and as it yanked me back out sideways, our backpack that we carry our safety rope in, down on our leg... it got caught in Ace's line. So there the chute was pulling me sideways... maybe at a horizontal angle, and Ace was below me and I couldn't get loose. But I've always carried a Murphy Combat knife with me. We had a little knife on the ah, chestpack too, but I carried that Murphy Combat knife strapped in my other leg there. And as that chute was pulling me I got to thinking... "I got to get out of this." I was just reaching down... I was going to cut Ace's line... that's how much we thought of each other. But I figured I had to get out of it [and] was going to cut his lines. And before that happened, why, the chute did tear us loose. I told Ace about it when I got down. [Laugh].

BB  How did he feel about it?

RM  Oh, well, that's the way we feel about each other... we all
laughed, you know. I told him how much I thought of him, but I was going to cut those two lines. Of course, really, I knew he wouldn't mind. I knew two lines wouldn't hurt. It's better to get out of that before you get to the ground because you'd hit at that attitude, I'd get quite a blow, and two lines cut in there I really knew wouldn't hurt, but when you tell them, "I was going to cut Ace's lines." Why, oh boy, what a guy you are." You know.

BB Is there any other time you had... you got tangled up in lines or...

RM Yes. Ah, I made one tree landing in my life. I never hit another tree since, and I'll tell you why; We come into this thing and just the very tip of my chute caught this pine tree. It was quite high, but the rest of my chute and lines all fell below me. I looked as I was hanging there, got my rope out... some of the boys had single point releases, but I've always stuck with this chest release there. Anyhow, I was getting out of my chute and trying to come down on the rope. As it happened, ah... (this leg pack always seems to get me into trouble), but as I was coming down the lines began to pull me upside down from my leg pack, they were hooked on there. Then, I didn't know it at the time, but I got a half hitch on the line round my neck. And I... as I was decending, I kept looking down. Oh, fifteen feet farther and I'd hit the ground, so... with this line around my neck and the other one holding my... where my pack was, on my leg, I was turned upside down. I had to begin to pull on my rope to get me closer to the ground. I think I was about five feet off the ground and that half hitch around my neck... was tightening up. And I knew then, that I was in trouble. I was getting dizzy, or... you don't get dizzy, you kind of black out, is what happens. And I begin to throw up... upside down, (and that's quite a thing). Well, I just threw up... and I knew the buddies were around here pretty close, but they said I was hollering, "Knife! Knife!" And they had just come around the corner, I was hanging not too high, and I was hollering, "Knife!" I'll remember the knife they gave me. It wasn't probably a... a very pretty knife but when it... when I saw that knife and I can remember it today, it shone. It just really sparkled out there... like a silver knife. I don't know why, but that's what I had in mind... it was a beautiful silver shiny knife. I grabbed that and took one swipe of that line and that was the only thing holding me... I fell to the ground and in a few minutes I was all right. But I'll never forget that knife. Just like in the story book... it was a big silver shiny knife, and that one swipe did it.

BB That knife that saved you.

RM That knife saved... of course, they could have got me too, see, but I guess... they said I was hollering all right, but I was kind of... with that half hitch around my neck, I probably wasn't making too much noise.

BB Was anybody ever seriously injured while you were jumping?
RM  Ah, when I came back from Missoula, one boy had been killed but ah, that boy was the one that tripped backwards when that tree fell and it did get his head... cut his head and that boy did die. That's the only one... fatalities that we had that I know of.

BB  Do you know what the boys name was?

RM  Begin with an "L". I'd never met the boy, and I can't remember his name. [Les Lycklima-- ed.] But what happened was; they were to... the way I understand it... they were to turn and run. He backed up and caught his, ah... heel in a crotch of a tree and that tripped him. And then when that tree did fall it was just ah... if it had just maybe a few inches farther, he'd have missed it but it tore the top of his scalp off. He... as I remember, I think it was Costan Aquirre?, C. D. Aquirre, and John L. Hennessy on that fire. Costan put a compress on the boys' head while I think it was Aquirre... or ah, Hennessy that had to run the distance to the Ranger to get help, but the boy did die.

BB  What year was that?

RM  '46, I believe. Yeah, the first... '46... the first year, because I was training in Missoula and, ah... I was trying to remember. We was talking about that the other day... whether it happened while I was right here training or just after I had got to McCall. I think it actually happened while I was here training because the first group trained here in Missoula and they were already back there jumping.

BB  Did you ever have any time to jump with Missoula when you were at McCall, or Missoula with McCall, or McCall with Missoula?

RM  I've never got in a mixed fire with the boys in Missoula but ah... it had been just fine. I'd have fought right with the Missoula boys just as well and... because Missoula to me is just kind of a... oh, it's kind of a home. That's where I started and it's pretty up here. I like it. I like the people. It's just a great place. So, Missoula's still a soft spot in my heart, yeah.

BB  Does... did the Smokejumpers from each base get along pretty well?

RM  Oh, I heard a little bit about the... a little friction started and it's too bad. I think it's a little misunderstanding. Oh, it's not too bad, because it's not that serious. Of course, there's always competition... no matter what you do... even among friends. You go there and you compete with something... you greet the guy... you wish him good luck and then you go as hard as you can if you're against him, and when you're through, then you come back and ah... see who's the better man or whatever the competition was. But it seemed that on this one fire the McCall bunch had jumped and the Missoula bunch had jumped in there. The fire was, ah... quite a fire at that time but when they come in,
it was quite a while... they had to drop the food to them. And the way I understand it was... the airplane when they dropped the food... the food was dropped on the Missoula side. Of course in the air, you wouldn't know whether it was Missoula or McCall boys, but it just so happened that the food went to the Missoula boys over there. When they got the food, "Why... sure we'll share with those other jumpers. Let them know we got the food." Which is good thing, you know. We had done the same thing, visa versa. The distance they were hollering over there to the McCall bunch, "Hey, we got the food. Come over and get it... get some food." It was hard to hear, and the McCall boys misunderstood it. The way I understand it, and they thought the Missoula boys were razing them, so they gave them the finger. And when they gave them the finger, the Missoula boys says, "Well if that's the way they are, why, we'll just keep and eat the food." [Laugh]. That's what happened there.

BB Did that ever get patched up then?

RM Oh, I think so. You know, you get us guys together, why, we do just fine together. But... oh, there's always something like that but I don't really think it's serious. We're jumpers... we're smokejumpers. And if you come out there and says, "Those Missoula boys are in trouble." No hesitation... we'd be right there to help them. Or if the McCall boys were in trouble... you'd see these boys over there. Of course, it could be a case like this; if Missoula were in trouble, "Come on let's go get those guys and get them out of there. Then we could say how we saved Missoula." Or the other way around. Missoula, "Let's go get those McCall boys out, we'll tell them how good we are." That's the thing. It's, uh... it's not a bad feeling, you bet.

BB Did you happen to know anybody that was on the Mann Gulch fire? I realize you weren't jumping then, but did you know anybody?

RM No. I heard a lot about it. Oh, that was a tough thing to hear... because that is a tough situation. It's awful hard to see what happened there, but I didn't know those people. It's just too bad and I felt sorry for them. And I think the man was right when he, ah... got the boys... the survivors, to lay down like he did and, ah... I don't know what happened up there... the others. The squad leader did the right thing.

BB You think...?

RM We can always see that... you know, hindsight's always better. But still, I think [if] the squad leader had told me the same thing, I think I'd had just got down like he told us to and saved all of them... but it's just too bad that that happened.

BB You think that there was a panic?

RM That's the way I understand. It's a panic and, ah... panic is quite a thing. It sure changes people. People do strange
things, and I think you kind of lose the logic of everything, but that squad leader done there... I think he did the best he could. He did the right thing.

BB Do you think that being in the military would have helped? I mean as far as; if you were given an order to stay and to lay down, that you're more apt to do that, opposed to...?

RM Well, ah... you mean other than like the younger people and them coming in now? I really don't think so, for this reason; in the military training, yes we had that... to obey orders and everything but in a tough... in the extreme situations, I think our boys will all act the same, whether they had the military training or not. I think if they were given the orders and the logic and the right training, I don't think it would be any different in there.

BB How do you feel about professionalism? Do you feel that you were a professional?

RM No. Ah... never did think I was a professional. I thought I was part of the Forest Service. That was the job and I was proud to be part of the Forest Service. It was a job and there was something to it. I enjoyed it. There was just something about it I liked. I never felt like a professional at all.

BB Do you think that the organization has turned more professional, these days?

RM No, but there's a change these days, I believe. I believe these younger people are in a... I would say a tougher world. Competition is tougher and ah... they have their different goals, different training, and schools and everything. They're coming back in here... which makes a difference. I just haven't been with these people to really tell you too much about it, but it's pretty hard to beat the feeling that we had for each other. I sure hope it still continues the same way with these young people, even though they have all different jobs and different ways of life that they're going to go. I still think that feeling stays within. I wouldn't doubt but what it does, because they're the same type of people, just born in a different era. And the war years is the only things that was a little different. We were, what you call maybe, a little more wild, because during those war years, I never even... we had drink in our home all the time but I never drank a drop until I went to the service.

BB How do you feel about women entering smokejumping?

RM Oh, I kind of thought... I got the shock of my life. I didn't know women jumped until we came through McCall. That was on Friday. We came up there and, ah... walked there through the loft, talk with the fellows... the young fellows there, and... course, I thought, well sure they'd have girls in loft and packing because girls are... you're good at this kind of jobs. And, by gosh, this little girl... Dianna is, ah... Diane or
Dianna, and met her, and one of the guys said, "Yeah, she's jumping with us." So, she happened to be right there as we were getting the hats and the sweaters... we were borrowing them at McCall there... and I says, "Oh, how do you like jumping?" I fell over backwards, a girl jumping... she had her regular fatigues on, like they wear, and says, "I like it." I don't know how it came about, I asked her... I thought it was her first year, and she says, "Fourth year." Holy Smoke! And I didn't even know about it. I says, "You actually jump and go on the forest fires with these guys?" "Yeah." It kind of shocked me. I had never heard that. So, ah... I got to thinking a little about it and I'll tell you, there's quite a thought on that. It could be debatable, but the way I feel is; The girls... we couldn't just... there... girls are fine. I just like them, and we can't do without you. There's a lot of spirit and, ah... amongst the girls and boys when they work together. What gets me... like, they've got in our country now, and it's too bad. Women are trying to excell over men... the way it seems to me on some of these meetings that they get. I heard the one in Texas, anyhow, and, ah... that's too bad. Because I think they've lost the sight of all manhood... the good side of it. Women, ah... want to get up there because they're a woman, not because of the job or anything else, and they're going to beat a man. That isn't the way I see it... even when I come up here. That's right here... when I come here in Missoula and I met these young girls here, doing jobs like... like you're doing and that. I met the finest people that, I would proud to work with you... anything. I would be happy to work right along side of you. And, ah... thinking about the smokejumper as a girl.... Well, I know you girls can do it! I know you girls can train. I know you can do a good job. Fine and, ah... you bet, I'd be proud to work right with you. I even... for some reason, you lend a little better atmosphere... to talk with each other, and heck... you feel good. If you had a job, even if you were my superior, you told me to go out there, we got to go out there to do something. You bet your life, we'd go do 'er. The only thing I see, as I thinking about it last night, and I was kind of thinking about this situation; The only thing I see about a women smokejumper, I don't think... I don't think I would care for... for this reason; ah... when the girl goes in and jumps, there are going to be so many different men on many of some of the bigger fires, and this and that. A little fire, if you could just keep it contained, that... that girls' going to pull her weight. And I believe it... I believe she could do it, and I'd be glad to have her. And I believe she'd be in safe hands. By safe hands, it looks like, ah... we're the dominant one, but that isn't that way... what I mean is; we treat you good and you'd treat... she'd treat us the same way. But... you're going to meet a lot of people and they're not going to know whether that's a girl or boy. There's no... you can't tell. You look at a girl... she's in fatigues and you can't tell whether she's a girl or boy, see. You're going to meet, maybe bad language and ah... oh, what would you call it... oh... relieving yourself, and things like that. And you know, there's, ah... that part in there. That's why I don't think that girl belongs on the fighting line. But I'll tell you, as far as
he can spot him, and setting up those ah, the, ah... "things" for us, you can't beat a girl. Because they will be even better than a man. They're more conscientious, and you know they'll know what they're doing. And, ah... Boy, I got a wife now, and I'll tell you; I've learned more since I've been married, and I've learned to appreciate women more than I ever have in my life, you know. I think... well, I know you women agree... but just on that one thing; jumping onto a fire, there'd be all kinds of men, and everything. I don't quite like that yet. I might get used to it if I were around it, see, and since I haven't been exposed to it, it's a little bit hard to take. It's not that I don't like it... don't get me wrong because I do, but that... that's the thing I was thinking. You can pull your weight and you're great to be talking to, and enjoying, and it gives the men, ah... maybe even strength at times. But that one thing; you're coming in with another, maybe group of men, that can't tell whether you're a women, or not. And things had happened in the there, then there could be a little... but maybe I'm wrong on that. If I were around the women jumper long enough, had jumped with them or something, then maybe I would change my mind and say, "That's just all right!" And it could be that way. But right now... when it hit me and [I] found out; women smokejumpers... gosh. Darn. [laugh] Quite a shock.

BB I can see where it would be.

RM Yeah.

BB Did you ever get to go on any rescue jumps or anything like that?

RM No. Mine were all fire jumps and, ah... I had never been on the rescue jumps. I heard a lot about them and, ah... course in the posse duty that I'm doing at home now, we have a few calls to go out on to get some people. But while I was in the jumpers, I had never been on a rescue jump but we did have our first aid training which was good. Being away from that first aid training, I might forget an awful lot... which I think I have already. I don't know what I would do... I'd just do the best I could. For instance, ah... Friday... this... now that you mention this it, comes in quite a bit... that man passes out on my shoulder there and, ah...

BB At the fairgrounds?

RM Yes. So, when I... he was leaning on me... I was talking to Kenny Roth at that time, and next thing I know a heavy... man's fell on me. And there was that man and his head went down. Well, I don't know my first aid training or anything... I really don't remember a lot but I just grabbed the man and pulled him gradually and put him on one of the tables that was right there, at the gate there. Then I remember you better pull his legs up and things like that... I can remember those kind of things... like, that wouldn't be... I don't know if that would come from our first aid, ah... first aid training. We got the man down
there and I didn't have anything to cover him up with because I felt his... brow and it's sweaty and cold. I thought about taking my shirt off but that wouldn't do much good, you know. So, I brought his knees up and we kept him there. Somebody brought a jacket and put under his head... in a short while they... the man [was] pretty well on his feet. We took him back to a car, and then told the family to get him to bed. It turned out good. In fact he came to our dinner yesterday and he was in good shape.

BB Was it serious or...?

RM No. I think it ah, just kind of passed out ah... I think he was on a little bit of medication, and maybe that with a little bit of everything else... why, then it was just maybe... just kind of something that set in there and put him into shock for a while. Everybody co-operated good and did the best we could.

BB Do you think that the jumpers would be good as rescue... as a rescue unit?

RM Absolutely... you couldn't beat them. In fact.... Now! There's a good point for a women jumper. You know, sometimes you get those girls down there and they can think of things, sometime a man doesn't, and you take in on a rescue squad and that girl... little girl wants to go in there... I liked her quite well, Diane. I just met her; fine little girl.

BB Do you know what her last name is?

RM No, ah, they probably told me... she's from McCall. Just... I can't remember... she told me the name, too, but I can't remember. You take that girl...

[INTERUPTION]

RM I think that the, ah... it'd be a wonderful place and you take the girls and they're jumpers, and they'll do you a good job. I think there's many times as it happens, and I've learned through experience; those girls will think of something maybe the man won't quite think of. Speaking of girls... along this line, I'll tell you one of the lessons I had to learn. I always figured, years ago... of course, this was when I was young that; I was a smart feller and boys were the dominant, and a girl couldn't teach me anything. I come back from the service, I was trying to find an instructor pilot to teach our boys at Homedale, Idaho, to fly. We also had one girl who wanted to learn how to fly. I tried to get the men instructors there and ah, they just wouldn't come out to Homedale, but we could go in to Caldwell or some of the other town and that's too far for us to go. I heard of a lady by the name of Laura Connor, from Meridian. Gosh, it went against my grain! (This is one of my first lessons that I have learned.) So, I figured I couldn't get these other instructors, I'll try her. I went on and called her and she said she'd be home. She and her husband were home there at Meridian,
and I went over to meet her. Small red headed women. And by gosh, I got to talking with her... first five minutes I knew that women was good! It was just something about her, somehow you get... and, you know, they're good... there's something about it when you're talking to them. Anyhow, I asked if she would come out here. "Yes. I'll come out to Homedale." I'll tell you that's one of the greatest things that ever happened. I don't care how many men instructors you come across, they'll never beat that women. She's one of the best. She took those kids up and she would tell them an easy way. Like, a man, if you're riding the rudders, he'll say, in so many... so language, "What are you doing?" He says, "That's no way to... do it this way." Laura Connors had never done that to our people. She was gentle but she said things that stuck with us. So there's the first lesson I learned. Those women are all right.

BB Over the years, have you noticed any changes in the... policies or anything, from when you jumped to when they jump... they're jumping now?

RM Yes. Discipline has come in far more than when we started, and I think it's a great thing. I think that's good. Discipline is much better and, ah... whenever you lose discipline you lose a lot, no matter what you're doing. And it has changed that way. I noticed your equipment when I was going through the loft. The suits haven't changed too much, the design. So that makes me think when they design that suit early, they did a fine job. A little improvements, the weight of the clothes, and different make... that's great. The thing I did notice yesterday, you got, ah... I've never had this... ah, eat in [inaudible]... of dried food or dehydrated food. We had canned foods in those days. So, that's an improvement too. I suppose... I've never ate that dehydrated food! I'll learn someday but, anyhow... I think it is. Your equipment is good and a lot of improvements made us better, yep.

BB How do you feel about the fire policies and how they've changed through the years?

RM Oh, ah... you know what I'm finding, and it's too bad, too. I find the policies... I don't know what they are exactly but I'll try and explain this. Between, like, BLM lands, and state lands, and this and that and you can't go in here, which I think is rotten. That's terrible! You got a fire... somebody's going to have to pick the tab up, we know that. But for Pete's sake get in there and get the fire out, and then settle it! Now this happened here yesterday, which I think that John, ah... Who's that young fellow here?

BB John Harper.

RM John Harper? And... You know, that's another thing. This shows you how the girls did. The girls were in there. That fire started out here. Max Glaves and I thought, "Doggone it... shucks. Let's just go out there and try to stop it. It's quite a
ways from us. Fire started up, and you know who came up with the first idea? One of the girls, "Ought to drop a borate on there and it would sure kill it quick!" Ah... Let's see... I can't remember the girls'.... Were you there at that time? I see. Anyhow, then right there, there's good thinking. Shows you that girl's on the ball and she's thinking good... right there... good business, you know. We didn't go, and the fire did spread. But it's a good thing, showing you those girls could use their heads and think, and I like that.

BB How do you feel about letting fires burn?

RM Out?

BB Letting them burn in, like, wilderness areas or...?

RM Burn out. You mean, themselves?

BB Yeah.

RM I like to go in and stop them. I don't care whether it's a wilderness. Ideas... and you know, some of those in that wilderness, ah... it hurts me. Well, what even hurt me when it come up with the discontinuation of that spray for the timber on the... we used DDT. And, this was after I left of course, and I had noticed the damages done. It hurts me to beat the dickens. Then you get to talk to the wildlife people... that spray, they claim, injures the fish or something like that, you know... or wildlife. So then I have to balance that off... well that's OK, and; that's not so bad. I don't know... it takes a little thinking on that, and I suppose they're right, the way they're thinking. But the policies they have where the State land... and whether you should go here and... whether you can't go there, I think that's wrong. I think you'd better get them in there... get those fires out. Did you know that trees support a great amount of our oxygen in this world? The timbers have gone, and... well we have a lot of green, but many of the great trees... I think that we should.... You know that's another thing that brings up a point. You know what I'd like to see? Even the jumpers, when they're not busy... I like to see jumpers... or even to start up an organization like CCC used to be... plant trees. Get them out there, plant more trees in these areas. That isn't that bad... it isn't that bad, and in just years you can make a world of difference for the good. So... and they say you can't go in here because you got equipment here, and this and that, and you can't get equipment in to those men. If those people could see how those fire fighters... jumpers, all go back in there. They're tired... dead tired at the end of a fire. Trying to come back out, you can't send equipment in. I like to have them out there on those fires and then we'd show them something, you bet!

BB Do you have anything through your smokejumping career that you enjoyed the most? Do you have any incidence or...?
RM Oh, all the incidences were so good, it seemed like to me. Maybe at the time we had a little... few fears, and this and that, but I'll tell you; the Forest Service... it just one big spot for me. I don't know whether you kind of... like a person always coming back to his homeland. That's the way I feel. Maybe... oh, probably could, if a person thought about, find a few exciting incidence but it's kind of hard to remember right now.

BB Did you... did you continue doing any kind of jumping after you were out?

RM Yes. Ah... I can't tell you where I bought them, but I bought some condemned twenty-four chutes. And, ah... (they were to be burned), I bought them for forty dollars. And I made this one twenty-four as my seat pack, and the other twenty-four... and I still have those right now at home. I made exhibition jumps in Caldwell. In fact, I made ah, "Keep Idaho Green" program in Caldwell, and I'll remember that one. They hadn't had any jumpers and they knew I was jumping... in ah, different... I jumped in McCall, Shorelodge... in fact I was pretty close in Shorelodge. I made a couple of free falls there and Jim Larkin jumped me off this one time and I thought... "I'll make a little closer jump." And I went out and, ah... I enjoy jumping and I was purposely clawing the ground, or the air I should say, and then I come to a fine attitude that I was just falling... my arms wouldn't fall. Most peaceful attitude I think I've ever had. And as I was coming, in I could hear people hollering and whistling. And then, I figured... it's time to open that chute. It was just a little bit late. But as the chute snapped I hit the water... no chance to get out from ah... my harness and we had a little breeze in that... pale lake there... Well the chute, didn't collapse, and I was trying to... while I was under water, I was getting the, ah... I got the leg straps undone, but I couldn't get that chest strap undone. And that's the one reason I asked yesterday about the single point release. Had I had the single point release, I could have twisted it, popped it, and I would have been free of my chute. But this chest strap kept hanging onto me and the risers come from more or less the back part of my chute so as I swam to the top to get air... I was fine... I got my head above the ground, then I had to quit swimming to undo this chest strap... my chute was pulling... back underwater I went. Gosh I nearly drowned before the next boats could catch me. Frankie Brown at McCall, Warren Browns' son, his boat come in and pick me up that time. That was pretty close.

BB So, um... do you feel that the chutes you used as opposed to the chutes that they used today is definitely an improved... safety wise?

RM Oh, yes. The only thing, ah... I saw their chutes yesterday and I think that they're the greatest. I don't know whether I would go for along these new square type chutes yet. I don't know in our work, or I should say the smokejumpers work, whether that would be a good idea. I like the chutes we got now and I
think I'd stick with them.

BB What... what exactly are they?

RM Those, ah... the thirty-two footers. They have the slots... the guide slots, and they're quite a bit different than your, um... what'd they call the skydivers chute? I think we should stick right now until maybe some other things are corrected or better that... I think we should stick with just the material that we got. We got good material in here, the right things, and the right suits. The suits are better, they have floatation in them and I think things are pretty well just the way they are now. They can... making more improvements, all right, but that's my opinion on the parachutes, and I'd like to leave it just like it is until they find better.

BB Is there um... do you think that their way of getting... if you got hung in a tree... is that any better now or is it basically the same?

RM Pretty close to the same. The way you threaded back.... Well, I'll take it back. Now, the tour did show me something else... the way you unhook that from your risers. Now, that is good. We never... we didn't have that, see. I like that. With just a snap, and it unhooks from your riser, and you come down on your rope. The threading into your harness and that is about the same, but the... I like the way that you got that hook up. That is much better for hanging up. Fact, you know, I... speaking of an incidence there in Caldwell, I made, ah... for the For... It was the "Keep Idaho Green" deal... for the Smokejumpers of Idaho. And I don't know, they asked me to make a jump and my chutes weren't ready that time so they got me a chute, I don't remember... I think it was from Boise some place, and I.... The pilot took me up, I dropped my red flag to see where we were going, but he turned the wrong way and we lost it. Well, in those days, people didn't know you were supposed to close the airports while airplanes had been coming in, so... I told the pilot, "I lost that drift chute." And he says, "Well, I'll circle." Well we couldn't see where it landed, but an airplane had come in, and then the ground crew got excited and they went down on one end of... well, not even part way down on the runway... marked an "X"... a white "X", and I thought... "By gosh..." (We was talking over with the pilot.) "... that must be where my drift chute went... they marked it for me." This was over at Caldwell's... and, ah... so I made corrections for the altitude and the jump. I bailed out of there, and the chutes that they got for me had no guidelines. They were a small chute, and when I... that chute opened up... I looked, and right away I knew I was going the wrong direction completely. I headed into the town and Caldwell and I landed three blocks in the main town of Caldwell from the bowling alley. Another thing that was a funny thing that happened was, I was coming over some wires, but as I was coming over two girls were walking hand in hand... they were holding each others hands and walking in there. Young girls I'd say... maybe about... oh, eighteen. And anyhow, I actually thought I
was going to run into them, (I was osculating), so I says, "Hey you girls, lookout... I'm coming in." I'll never forget, their fingers just spread out... they looked up... they didn't move one step, but I osculated behind this house and hit a clothes line wire... cutting my mouth and everything. I was doing a little cussing because I was going the wrong way... I knew that. I was getting out of my harness and the girl peeked around... she was a fine looking girl... quite a good looking girl, she looked around... all I could see was her head when she peeked around the corner... she say's, "Are you hurt?" I guess I was swearing a little bit and I said, "No." But I noticed her and from that time I never saw that girl. She disappeared and I never saw her again. [Laugh]. The people in the back yard I landed in, in Caldwell... their name is Hanna... Mark Hanna. They were out at the airport watching me jump, so when they came home, why here's the newspaper people... they put the name up and called me Wrong Way Corrigan. Here I was... they were out at the airport and I was in their backyard. Had they stayed home, I'd have been right there. [Laugh].

BB So did you have any nicknames that you went by?

RM Well, ah, yes... the Whistler... in the... in fact my helmet... the one that I said that I painted up and I had the parachute helmet. The parachute all painted on, and that was the Whistler. I did a lot of whistling, especially when I come out after the fire. I enjoyed whistling... so, they nicknamed me the Whistler, yep.

BB So, how do you feel these days when you look up on a mountain and you see smoke... like yesterday when you saw that fire? What kind of feelings did that bring out?

RM You know that's a funny thing. I wanted to get out there and go up there and get it out. Isn't that something. It still... I know we can do it. Here we were, oxfords and no equipment. No pulaskies or anything, and I told, ah... well, you're girls were up here and Max Glaves and I were here and the other, Ace Neilson... I was thinking, "With you girls and us, (I had a four wheel drive pickup that we come up in.) we could climb that mountain... I bet we could get that out." Of course, no equipment, no clothes or anything... it would have been a bad thing to do, so. I hated to see that fire burn, but there was nothing we could do.

BB So when you see smoke you... does that bring back memories for you?

RM Makes me want to go over there and put it out. I don't know why? It's just something about it... I see smoke, that means injury to me and our old smokejumping days. I can still get those fires out, you bet. And I'm ready to go. [Laugh]. In fact, we just hoped that maybe, ya... the people would like to see the old jumpers jump. We were talking about it if they are... well, we'll go give it a try. [Laugh].

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BB I thought it would have been a good idea.

RM We'll make these young fellows, hit the spot. You can't tell... we might miss it completely. [Laugh].

BB Well, do you have any other stories you would like to tell or anything else you'd like to say?

RM Oh, the longest I talked in one time, ah... I enjoyed it but ah... without anybody telling me to shut-up I thought that was pretty good. I really don't have too much more to say but I will say, about the smokejumpers reunion; since we come up here, stopping in McCall, meeting those boys and the girl jumpers, which is kind of a suprise, but was real nice. I appreciate the girls' courage, and that. The only reason I was thinking about girls gonna jump with... just that main thing, not that you girls can't do it, and not that we wouldn't love to have you there... that's, ah... but I would... right now, the way I feel, unless I jumped with them and learned a little later that I feel that... I wouldn't want them on the fire. I'd always feel protective of them, or something like that. We don't like to see them come under certain conditions, you know. That's the only thing I have... not that you girls can't do it and not that we wouldn't want you, but... coming over to Missoula... this reunion. Meeting you people here... talking with you... I think it was a great thing. It was good for young and old. It was just great! You know another thing I noticed, too... you done a big job up here... people don't see that. How much work you went into... doing things like you doing now. Out of all you people, I've never seen nicer people... pleasant people. Makes me feel good, yeah.

BB You have a career you should be proud of. It was nice to talk to you.

RM Thank you. [Laugh].

BB Thanks.

RM You bet ya, OK. [Laugh].

[INTERUPTION]

BB Is there anything else you would like to mention?

RM Well, just in ending this thing... yes, I would. On the tour yesterday, we were going through and they were mentioning and showing us their streamers that they'd used to drop, indicating the wind drift. I had a notion to tell him what we'd done in McCall but then I ah... I didn't do it but I will now. I meant to tell him that in McCall, after we got there... we have a jumper named Ace Neilson that we figured was expendable... he was quite lucky all the time, we figured we'd drop him out for the drift chute and if he made it all right, we'd go in.
BB  Ha... that's pretty good! [Laugh]. Thanks.

RM  You bet.

[END OF INTERVIEW].