DH This is an Oral History interview with Joseph Osborne in the Archives of Mansfield Library on July 23, 1984 for the Smokejumpers Oral History Project. Mr. Osborne, I'd like to start the interview by asking you: when did you begin smoke jumping?

JO Well, in the Summer of '43. That was the season I came out to this part of the country in May of that year... May of '43.

DH And how did you become involved in the project?

JO Well, I had been in civilian public service... this was all alternative service for conscientious objectors of World War II and I had been in C.P.S. [Civilian Public Service] for not quite a year, since June of '42... the preceding year. And the project had been set up and volunteers... persons who were volunteering for the project... and there were quite a substantial number of volunteers, and we were chosen from among volunteers.

DH Where were you from?

JO Indiana.

DH And where were you based at?

JO Well, before I came out here, I had been in a little town near Merom, Indiana, which is south of Terre Haute. And about April of '42, I'd gone from that camp to a camp at Trenton, North Dakota, where I was there for about... say, a month before I came out to this particular unit in Missoula and Seeley Lake.

DH How did the C.P.S. program arise?

JO Well, under the provisions of the Selective Training Service Act... the Selective Service and Training Act, I guess was the official title, of 1940, there were provisions for those persons who were conscientiously opposed to participation in war in any form. And the classification was 4-E, and if their draft board classified them as 4-E, then they were doing what was called alternative service of some sort or another. And these went under various... the work project went under various government agencies: the Soil Conservation Service, the Park Service, the Forest Service, and some other agencies became involved later.

DH Why did you pick the smokejumping project out of all the different project that were available to work on?

JO There weren't too many that were available. It sounded a little bit more interesting. Most of the projects were not too interesting and this sounded a little bit different, so I thought I'd give it a try.

DH Would you like to talk about the reasons why you were
opposed to the war?

JO Well, I'm opposed to killing persons under any circumstances, and war, in my estimation is just a mass murder... it's murder on a very large scale, which happens to be legalized.

DH Do you feel that you... before you got to the smokejumping project, did you feel that you received any prejudices because of your convictions about the war?

JO Well, I had been a teacher at Purdue University, which is a fairly militaristic institution... it's not a military school, you understand, it's a state school... land grant school but they had a very strong R.O.T.C. [Reserve Officer Training Corps] and well, there were probably some of the faculty there who would be opposed to my position; and I had some friends who were there on the faculty who were sympathetic, too.

DH Where did you do your training at?

JO Seeley Lake, the first Summer. And Nine Mile the next two Summers.

DH How many fellows were with you when you went through your training?

JO Well, at Seeley Lake in 1943, there were sixty of us who had been selected. And we first went to Camp Paxson on the south side of the Lake and the group of sixty was divided up into two smaller groups of thirty each... thirty training... the first first training group consisted of thirty and then they'd go across the Lake to the ranger station each morning for the training period. And as soon as the first group had completed their training, then they were sent out to various places where they'd be for the Summer. And then the second training group, then moved across the lake to the ranger station... the bunk house, which was a little bit crowded because it wasn't really set up for such a large number. And then we had our training over there.

DH Did everybody that went through training eventually smokejump, or where there some guys that didn't make it?

JO Well, I sprained an ankle on my second jump that Summer, so I spent my first Summer on a lookout in the Seeley Lake District... Morrell Mountain Lookout. And there were some others, I think those in the first training group who'd sprained an ankle, had a chance to recuperate and continue their training with the second group. But those of us in the second that sprained an ankle were out for that particular season. So, I completed my training the next year and made fire jumps in the Summer of '44 and '45.

DH Were you receiving any kind of monetary compensation for your smokejumping?
JO No, we were not paid. Of course, we had our room and board and the Forest Service meals were really first-rate. Let's see... at the time we had a... from the Mennonite Central Committee, which was the administrative agency of the Civilian Public Service Unit, I think we had a general allowance of $5.00 a month, or something like that. Eventually by the end of this... of the program that I was in, we were getting in addition to the $5.00 a month actual cash from the Mennonite Central Committee the... there was a $5.00 a month clothing allowance from the Forest Service. We didn't get our hands on that cash, we had that much credit in several stores in Missoula. We could pick up work clothes if we needed. And there was also a $5.00 a month which went into a medical care fund, in case a person was injured in some way, then there would... these funds would be available for medical care. If a person was injured making a jump somewhere the Forest Service would furnish the transportation, but then the actual medical costs came out of this particular fund. So, that was a total of $15.00 a month, which was available in some way for the participants.

DH Do you remember who the guys were that were the administration or the trainers while you were going through?

JO Oh yeah! Earl Cooley was there... and Jim Waite... Wagner Dodge... Art Cockran, those were some of the men. And... let's see, later on in '44, I believe there was Glen Smith, who'd been involved previously and, I guess, returned to the unit, and Frank Derry, and one of his brothers, there was Al Kramer, these were some of the persons that were involved.

DH Did you feel that when you arrived at the smokejumper project that you were treated unfairly because of your religious convictions?

JO No, I thought we were treated quite well in the unit here. It was a good unit. And the men with whom we were certainly working with, all those that I've mentioned certainly didn't... they treated us quite well.

DH How about the fellows that were with you; is there some way you can characterize the guys that went through the C.P.S.?

JO Well, what do you mean? I'm not quite sure...

DH Do they have a common attitude or a common feeling...?

JO Well, yes. They may have come from a variety of backgrounds, as far as that goes... this particular unit was set-up, that is, there were three organizations that were in charge of administering the Civilian Public Service Camps around the country: there was the American Friends Service Committee, that's the Quakers; the Brethren Service Committee for the Church of the Brethren; and the Mennonite Central Committee for the Mennonites. There were these three basic camps around the country. Of the first sixty, there were twenty each that were chosen from each of
these camps, so that the persons who came might have had a variety of backgrounds, but they did have this one thing in common: that is their opposition to participation in war.

DH The equipment that you were using to jump with and to fight fires, was the quality of that in any way affected by the war effort?

JO Well, not as far as I knew. I've heard things, but as far as my own personal experiences were concerned, we were having good equipment. The first season, there were some Eagle parachutes. I had... three of my jumps were with an Eagle parachute, that's the one with the scallop around the edge and the steering ears, and the rest of it were with Ervings, which had been modified by using the Frank Derry slot. The Forest Service had... well, Frank Derry was the holder of the patent that had been assigned to the Forest Service... those were the steering slots and that was quite a nice chute. It had a much easier opening shock than the Eagle parachute, but... well, at first we had a number of silk parachutes, later on they were all... all the new ones that came in were nylon. One disadvantage of the silk is that the grasshoppers would have... would eat the silk and they wouldn't eat the nylon. So we'd have to... when we got down on the ground, why shake off any grasshoppers and stuff the parachute quickly in the bag which we had for the purpose.

DH How well do you remember your first training jump?

JO Oh, that's... oh sure, I remember that. Of course, we'd had a lot of preliminary training... fire training, and then, of course, the conditioning... the obstacle course, and then we had what they called the tower jumps, you know, which was really jumping down some twenty feet. Even though there was a net down at the bottom, you were stopped by the rope. That simulates the opening shock and it's harder than you'd ordinarily jump and land on your own feet. So that was just about as bad as making the first jump. We never knew exactly when our first jump would occur, you see. We knew we were getting kind of close and so one day they... at breakfast they said that the plane's been ordered and this is it. So... yeah this is pretty exciting... first jump.

DH What did you think about when you were standing at the door of the airplane ready to jump?

JO [LAUGH] You weren't standing, you were kneeling. You had your right foot out on a step and you were down on your left knee, this is the position that you'd go into for jumping, then you'd get the slap on the back, and then you'd go out. Well, [LAUGH] you've been all prepared for this and... so, I don't know. Lots of things might cross your mind under those circumstances, I guess.

DH How did you feel after you made that first successful jump?

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JO Well, of course as soon as the parachute opens, which is only two, or at the most, three seconds after you leave the plane, as soon as you feel that shock, all the tension is gone. I mean, I've never known anyone that had any feelings of apprehension when they were floating down on the parachute. It's all before, you know... before they bail out. And, as a matter of fact, they're so relaxed that they're kind of forgetting that they're going to be hitting the ground at a fairly good altitude. At Seeley Lake it was 4,000 feet... our jump spot... and it was rather hard, dry ground, and with substantially more than their own weight. Of course, we'd been taught to hit and roll to take the shock off of our feet. But you had to be in the proper position and it's difficult to gage exactly when you were going to land, because there's nothing in your previous experience, you see. If you jump off of something, why you're all ready to land; you know when its going to be. But unless your... there's... so your coming down close to some object, such as a tree, you're really not too much aware of your motion. Up in the air, you're just hanging there and the objects on the ground gradually get larger. It's... there's no sensation that's really quite like it.

DH Do you remember where your first fire jump was at?

JO Yes, it was the next Summer. I don't know whether your familiar with the Seeley Lake region, but on the east side, there is Rice Ridge, which is a rather heavily timbered ridge which goes up to maybe 6,000... 6,500. And that... in back of that is the tail end of the... the southern end of the Swan Range, which, of course, is much rugged. It was... er, some time along the Summer of '44, another fellow and I jumped to a very small fire which was on this wooded slope of Rice Ridge. It was a tiny little fire, only about 800 square feet, I guess... something like that.

DH What kind of planes were you jumping out of?

JO Well, there were the two planes: the Ford Tri-motors and the Travelaire... the Travelaire was a single engine. They both had the same kind of engine in, the Ford Tri-motor had three Wright J-6 whirlwind engine, which is a 330 horsepower engine. The J-5 was the engine that Lindbergh used for his flight across the ocean, which was 225 horsepower. And they had the same engine in the Travelaire... the Wright J-6 with 330 horsepower. The Travelaire would take care of two jumpers and their equipment; the Tri-motor would take care of eight, plus their equipment.

DH Is there any one plane that you preferred to jump out of?

JO Oh, well... the Tri-motor had a slightly bigger door, so you're less apt to bang your helmet on the door. [LAUGH] First time I jumped out of the Travelaire, why I did catch my helmet on the door. And that... of course, you lose a few seconds if the plane is going seventy five miles an hour. They'd usually to cut the gun, put it into a glide so that's about what it's doing,
that would be 110 feet a second. If you lose two seconds, that's 220 feet, see, and he might be beyond the point where you should be getting out to come down to the spot that had been picked out. So the first time this happened, they just went around again and approached the spot and I got my head a little lower so it didn't hang up in the door.

DH How many jumps did you make in the years you were a smoke jumper?

JO Twenty five.

DH How many jumps did you make that first year?

JO Well, the first year, I sprained my ankle on my second jump and I spent the Summer on the lookout... most of the Summer was on Morrell Mountain Lookout, which is at the southern end of the Swan Range. Then there was another lookout in the district, called the Double Arrow Lookout, and it had been occupied by the local school teacher... a woman. There was a road to it and she came down, I think, early in September... about the time that school opened. And it was unoccupied for a while and then things began to dry out after I had been taken from the higher lookout. So I was sent up there for a while. And it was also during that period of... oh, September, I guess, that the Forest Service was training some Coast Guard fellows for rescue work in Alaska. And I did make a couple of jumps with them. So that brought it up to four the first Summer.

At that time the training period consisted of seven, and I hadn't completed the seven, so the next year I was put in with the new group who came in and started, essentially, over again. So, I made the seven at that time, which brought it up to eleven. Then there was a couple more, because the Forest Service didn't like for the time interval to be too long between jumps; and so when they had their training in the Spring, if there had been a couple of weeks or so, they'd give him another jump. And so number fourteen was my first fire jump. That was this little fire of 800 square feet. And then there was another practice jump... number fifteen that Summer. And then there was a considerably larger fire... number sixteen... down in the Bitterroots.

DH I want to go back to... you mentioned the woman working the lookout tower. Was it common for women to be working for the Forest Service?

JO They're... not too many. She was the only one in the Seeley Lake District, and I have no information about the other districts at the time. I understand, but I can't verify this, that the Park Service had used women on lookouts, and honeymoon couples, for instance, sometime before the Forest Service did. But I really don't know how common this was at this time.

DH Do you remember her name at all?

JO I think it was Kay Wellington. She was the school teacher
at the little one room school house at Seeley Lake and I think she had... she was an author also. I think she wrote a book of poems.

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

JO Well now, that's part of the business. I mean... of course any of the smokechasers, whether their smokejumpers or ordinary smokechasers, will do the pre-suppression work, as they called it... you know: trail work, and telephone maintenance, and gathering wood, and all this kind of thing. You know, that's part of the Forest Service work, that's all. I didn't mind that.

DH Was there any kind of project work that you really didn't like doing?

JO No, not particularly. KP [LAUGH] I didn't particularly care for that, but I don't suppose anyone did. I encountered some strange terms that I'd never encountered before, such as a bullcook, I mean, this apparently is a logging term. The bullcook, as you probably know, is a person who is... well, he chops the wood, and he gets up in the morning and starts the fires in the cook house, and this kind of thing. I think it goes back to the days when they used oxen in the logging camps and they prepared some kind of a meal or... for the oxen. I guess that's the origin of the term, but I'd never encountered it before.

DH How would the spotter let you know when it was time to go?

JO He'd pat you on the back. Before the jump, of course, they'd drop the little drift chute, as they called it... it was just a small muslin chute about three feet square that was loaded with a sack of rocks so it had about the same rate of descent as a jumper. They'd pick out a spot, and they'd side along something, and they'd drop one of these things out and see where it landed. All right. And then they'd go on the line with the next pass between the spot where it landed and the spot where they wanted to jump, and go the same distance beyond on the same line and drop out another one. If it came fairly close to the jump spot, well then this would be the spot that they would pick out to let the jumpers out... hoping that there had not been any change in the wind during this interval, which could happen, of course. Of course, we had limited control over the chutes. On my first jump, I landed only about eighty feet from the target, I never came that close again, so there's a certain amount of luck in the business of getting yourself down to the spot where you want to be.

DH What would the spotter be doing during the flight?

JO He'd be looking over the area... he's picking out a suitable spot to land. And then, as I say, there'd be the... two drift chutes would be dropped and then it comes in for the final pass. And depending upon the terrain, there might be two, or possibly three at a pass. The first one would be "riding the step", as
they'd say. He'd be in the doorway, we'd have our static lines all hooked up to the cable in the plane... he'd be there with his foot on the step and on his left knee, with his hands on either side of the door ready to pull himself out as soon as he gets the slap on the back. The spotter would signal the pilot on the direction to go... with his hand and tell him to "cut the gun"... he'd wave to him, they'd cut the gun so the jumper would not have the propeller blast to cope with. It would be just the forward motion of the plane. And then the next jumper... we got down as quickly as he could and go through the whole thing.

DH How well did you get to know the pilots that were flying the planes?

JO Oh, well, I flew with several of them. I wasn't extremely well acquainted with them, but sometimes I'd been up with some of them more than once... oh, just a speaking acquaintanceship, I guess.

DH Were they based there with you guys, or were they here in Missoula?

JO No, no. They were Johnson Flying Service... they're all from Missoula.

DH OK. Can you remember any kind of a... procedures that you were told in the first year that later on they changed, because they found that maybe there was a better way to do something?

JO Umm... I think the last year they did have some... a quick release harness. I don't know that I used that on any of the jumps that I made. The harness that we used in the first two years, there were snaps at the top of our harness which attached to the parachute. The reason for that was: in case a person landed with a tree, then he'd let himself down from the parachute, not from the tree. Later on they had a different kind of a harness. I don't know that... I think some of us... some of the persons in '45 used that, I don't think I did. So there weren't too many basic changes. There'd been lots of very careful work with the Forest Service before the Summer of '43, and so they had the procedures pretty well worked out. Of course, there've been a lot of changes in the forty years since then, you understand... different kinds of parachutes and so on... lots of different procedures.

We were never trained... in our fire training, we were never trained in anything about backfiring. We were aware that this was sometimes done, but this was something that was to be left to a person with a great deal of experience, because it's a very tricky kind of a business. As I understand it, the smokejumpers now probably do have some training in backfiring and they carry along these little fusees that they could use in setting a backfire, if necessary.

DH What is backfiring?
JO Well, of course, the fuel can only burn once. And if... under certain conditions, you may be able to make a larger fire break than you could do with just shovels and equipment of this sort, by setting a fire. I've seen it actually used only once, and there the circumstances were rather unusual. Of course, the maximum rate of spread of a fire is down wind, up hill. These directions don't always coincide. There was one fire I was on... oh, down in the Bitterroot somewhere in which the fire was on the lower slope and it was spreading up hill, but the general wind was in the opposite direction... over the top of the ridge. At the top of the ridge there was a trail, which is a small break already, and there was a backfire that was set up along this... the top of the ridge. And the wind would carry this, you see, in the direction of the main fire and just make a larger break at the top of the ridge, you see, which hopefully would stop it from going over. But it's... as I say, it's a very tricky business. Only a person with a great deal of experience should fool around with it.

DH How common were injuries when you were jumping?

JO Well, the Forest Service had quite a good safety record, as I understand, and I'm simply quoting from memory on the statistics, I think it was about one jump out of fifty in which there were some injury... sprained ankles were fairly common. And, of course, with the training period of seven jumps, why this would mean about one out of seven would have some sort of minor injury.

DH Is there anything that you can attribute the safety record to?

JO Well, they were simply very careful about this business. They... the Forest Service never regarded the fire fighters as expendable. If a man was injured on a fire, I mean, taking care of him had priority over fighting the fire. They've always done that.

DH Can you remember the largest fire that you fought?

JO Yeah, it was the Meadow Creek Fire... maybe it was the Nez Perce National Forest, down in the Selway-Bitterroot area, somewhere. It was about 1,000 acres, and that was the Summer of '45. Summer of '45 was, by far, the worst of the three seasons; '43 and '44 were pretty light seasons, there weren't too many fires then.

DH When you're fighting a fire, are you conscious of how many men are on the fire?

JO Well if it's a small fire, then you know how many are there, but a fire as big as 1,000 acres... well this would have a fire-line of several miles, and you would probably just see the persons along a particular segment of the fire line. I think on this particular fire, oh there was some German prisoners of war, and possibly some Indians, and maybe some fellows who were under
age... under the draft age and what not. Quite often on a big fire it's a very motley kind of a crew. [LAUGH] Anyone who they can get a hold of to fight the fire is going to be doing so. So a big fire, you probably wouldn't see too many of the others. And there might be several different fire camps that are set up. I think on this particular fire, I think they used some Army Negro paratroopers also... they were located in the same camp where we were.

DH Did you see any racial prejudice toward the guys of the 555th... Negro smokejumpers?

JO You mean from the other... prejudice against them from the other persons?

DH Uh-huh.

JO No.

DH You felt they were treated fairly and were assigned the same duties?

JO Yeah. Of course, most of the other persons that I knew were the Civilian Public Service men, who didn't have any particular feeling against them, anyway.

DH What about from the administration or the locals?

JO I didn't encounter it. If there was any, I didn't encounter it.

DH Is there any one fire that sticks out in your mind as being the most memorable fire?

JO Well, that one, because of its size was fairly memorable. The last one that I was on was... oh, maybe ten acres, but it was a long ways back. It was up in the Bob Marshall, twenty seven miles from a road. And in that respect it was fairly memorable... that was the last one, which was in August 26, 1945. There was some things about it... there were two fellows that had jumped on this fire on the Saturday evening and their cargo had come lose from the cargo chute... the cargo chute fluttered down... it was over a tree. But then the two fire packs, which contained their fire tools, and those two days of delicious K-rations, and their first-aid kit, and their flashlights, and the two sleeping bags came down somewhere... possibly in an alder thicket; and they never found it. And so they kept on their jump suits and wrapped up in their parachutes and tried to keep warm that night. [LAUGH]

They couldn't do anything about fighting the fire, so the next morning there was a Tri-motor load of us went out... we had a dawn take off in Missoula. Not quite dawn, but the lights of the city were still on. And it was an overcast day and we were kind of squeezed between the clouds and the mountains when we went through a pass to get back there. And I understand that
after we got out, that the plane couldn't go back the way it came, it had to follow the Spotted Bear River down to the Spotted Bear Ranger Station and landing strip... stay there until things cleared up. Well, so that made a total of ten of us on this fire and in five days we had it under control, and then there... five left and the other five stayed there to just mop up. And after we got it under control, then we spent quite a bit of time walking back and forth across this alder thicket, where presumably these fire packs were. There wasn't anything of great value except two goose down sleeping bags which are very nice. We never did find it. [LAUGH] It's probably still there.

DH How would you keep in... er, contact the plane after you were down on the ground?

JO Well, if there were as many as ten, like this one, a radio would be dropped, which doesn't necessarily contact us with the plane. We'd have contact with the ranger station or with Missoula, something of this sort. Well, when the jumpers get down on the ground, they have orange streamers which are in their rope pockets. When they land safely, they put down a marker to indicate to the pilot that they're all right. As soon as the pilot sees this, he wags the wings of his plane... so... and then he takes off. So there was that kind of a visual communication.

DH Had you received any kind of medical training?

JO Oh... well, when I was in base C.P.S. camp before I came to this one, I'd had a basic first-aid... the Red Cross first-aid course, that's all. There was several of us that had this basic first-aid certificate, you know. And I think they did have a... some refresher course at this unit. But that was about it... nothing more than that.

DH Did you feel that was adequate training for the hazardous job you were doing?

JO Well, I never had any occasion to really use it myself. There were some that did have occasion to use it. Well, in those days, if a person was injured way back in the back country, it takes a long while to get them out, and this would be stretching the limits of first-aid care if it's going to go on for quite a long time before there is any proper medical training. But, that was just the nature of... just because of the consequences of the time interval, I don't know what other kind of training they should have had. I mean, the basic Red Cross first-aid course was a pretty good course.

DH Did you ever have to haul an injured jumper out?

JO No, I didn't.

DH Did you say that injuries were more common from the act of jumping, itself, or from fighting fire?
JO  Well, most of the jumping accidents occurred during the practice jumps, so they'd be taken care of, you see. No problem there. I... at that time, I don't remember any particular... oh, there'd be minor injuries from fighting a fire... a person might get blisters on their hands, or they might chop their own feet, or something like this. I... well, fighting a forest fire can be hazardous, you know. It all depends on the fire; they come in all shapes and sizes. But... well, that's hard to say which is... in over... in general, which would be the more hazardous.

DH  After you returned from a fire, did you... was there paper work to fill out... did you have to file a report?

JO  There was a report on each fire, yeah.

DH  What kind of report did you have to file?

JO  Well, you give the location. Of course, if the fire's spotted from a lookout... if it is spotted from two lookouts, then they have the location rather precisely, because of the intersecting azimuth lines. But if it's spotted by only one lookout, he would have the azimuth line presumably, correctly, but he may not have the distance along this line. I remember on this last fire, which was called the Pentagon Fire, I think we could see both the lookout that had spotted the thing and another unmanned lookout in the vicinity. So, we have our own compasses and we could take backsites so we could locate the thing rather accurately for the record. I mean, the quarter section of the quad range and what not. And then, of course, there would be a description of the fire itself, how large, what the fire behavior. We'd pace it off and try and make an estimate. And if you could locate the origin... sometimes you can actually see the tree that was struck by lightning where the fire started. You may or may not be able to see that depending on how much it's burned around it after the fire has started. On this first fire, which was a very tiny one, there was a very definite lightning strike on the tree and it was burning around the base of the thing. So you fill out the details on this Forest Service form for the fire. And, of course, each one has a name, sometimes very strange name... it is a name with the locality of where it is.

DH  What would you do after the fire season was over?

JO  Well, then... the first year... '43, the persons who had come from the various Civilian Public Service camps around the country had the option of returning... that was the original plan: they would just come for the season. But then the Forest Service was somewhat short-handed for their regular work during the year and so the persons were given the option or either returning to the camps from which they had been selected, or staying on and doing other Forest Service work. And I elected to stay on. And there were several interesting things, I was on the crew that put up the suspension bridge in Big Prairie in the Bob Marshall Wilderness in the Fall of '43. That was an interesting
project. And then there was another smaller bridge up in Northern Idaho, near Lake Pend Oreille. And then at... those who were stationed at Nine Mile, they had a... there was a sign shop, a Forest Service sign shop, and they made these signs that you've seen around ranger stations or forest trails, so, there were various things. And then the second Winter, there's several of us that worked in the Region One office here in Missoula.

DH Did a lot of guys prefer to stay with the Forest Service rather than return to the camps?

JO I don't know... I don't have the statistics on that, but I think there were a goodly number. It was more economical for the Forest Service, because the Forest Service otherwise would have to pay their transportation back to where ever they came from and they might as well use them, you know, if they're willing to do so... willing to stay on. So, I think that a rather large fraction of them did stay on.

DH What can you tell me about these camps that the C.P.S. men came from? What were they like? Were they... men were actually physically restrained to stay on the base? Were they allowed...

JO Well, there were restrictions... they weren't physically restrained in the sense that there was barbed wire fence around, [LAUGH] or anything like this. But we were under the Selective Service. Persons who went into the Army... Selective Service, as soon as it had... they'd gone to the Army or what-not, Selective Service was no longer involved. But there was which was called a Camp Operations Division of Selective Service that was the government representative in the administering of these Public Service Camps. And there were rules: a person would earn furlough, for instance, at the rate of two and a half days a month and he could accumulate up to thirty days, I guess, so he could take his furlough. But there were restrictions about the number of persons at any one time that can be on furlough, for instance. And there were rules of this sort. So, they were confined... we were working under conscription, but we were not behind barbed wire fences, or anything like this.

DH Do you think that guys took the opportunity to go to smokejumpers to get out of these camps?

JO Well, it was a more interesting project, and a number of the work projects were not particularly good. I think most of them felt this was a more worth-while project.

DH Were there guys on the crew who felt that they had a duty... a patriotic duty to serve the country in some way, but they couldn't follow the lead over to fight?

JO Well, I think that they were willing to do anything... I think that they were interested in conservation, they considered this a worth-while project. I mean, using the words of the Draft Act, they were to be assigned to, quote: "work of national im-
portance under civilian direction." This was the general words which were used and there were several things which were decided that fit into this category. But, I think that they were all in favor of saving the National Forests, this was a worth-while project.

DH Towards the end of the war, were there any veterans that returned to the smokejumping project?

JO Let's see... the last Summer, it seems to me that one of the squad leaders had been in a paratrooper unit in one of the armed forces... I'm not quite sure which. He hadn't had much experience in forestry, but he had had experience in parachute jumping. And there might have been some others who came in along about that time, I don't know for sure.

DH When you ended your smokejumping career, how did that come about?

JO Well, I left this particular unit in December of 1945, and I was transferred to another Civilian Public Service Camp at... near Coshocton, Ohio. I was just there briefly, I was released in February of '46. I mean, the men were being released slowly. See, the conclusion of war was the preceding Summer... '45, so they were gradually being released. It was Selective Service that decided when they were to be released.

DH Did you feel that you wanted to continue smoke jumping after the war was over?

JO Well, I'd been a school teacher before, I'd taught at Purdue for about six years before I was drafted and so I went back into that. I went to my home town of Muncie and worked in an engineering office of a factory there that made automotive transmissions... Warner Gear Corporation, it was called. And then I'd put in an application hoping to get back into engineering education in the Fall, but it happened that Lehigh University was still operating three semesters a year, and so they wanted me to come in June of '46. And so I went back into teaching. I taught three semesters there and the following Summer, I thought: "Well I'd like to do something different in the Summer." And I think I did write to the Forest Service about the possibility of a job for the Summer, but at that time they had a strict rule of thirty five years. I think the rule has been somewhat relaxed since. If a person can pass the physical examination, whether he is thirty seven... or forty... or forty five... or what-not, why then he's in... if he has the other qualifications. But in the... I was '35 in the Summer of '46, and so in the Summer of '47, after I had completed this first year of teaching at Lehigh University, I would have been one year beyond their limit, so they were holding this limit.

DH Who's decision was it made to release the C.P.S. men?

JO That was Selective Service.
DH  Now... does Selective Service tell each C.P.S. camp that they were to release the men, or was it?

JO  It was all done on an individual basis. No, they wouldn't give an instruction to the camp to release so many men; no, it's the individual basis, depending on length of time they've been in, and their age, and all kinds of things. But this is strictly Selective Service decision.

DH  Did you know of any other C.P.S. guys that tried to remain with the smokejumper program?

JO  I think that there was one... I don't recall his name at the moment... who did stay with them for quite a long time, but that's the only one that I know about. I don't know whether there's others... there could have been others who wished to, but... who were more interested in forestry, I don't know... it's possible.

DH  You were a teacher before you became a smokejumper, what other walks of life did these come from?

JO  Oh, everything under the sun. [LAUGH] You name it... I mean, they were farmers, photographers, mechanics, loggers, there were some who had had some previous experience in the woods. Almost anything you can think of.

DH  I think I'm going to stop here and turn this tape over.

[END OF SIDE A]

[BEGIN SIDE B]

DH  What kind of equipment were you using to fight fires with?

JO  Well, there were the two basic tools: one was the pulaski, which is a contraption that has a kind of an axe head on one side and kind of a grub hoe on the other... it had two blades at right angles to each other, you see, one for digging the soil and the other's for chopping wood... it's a combination tool; and the other was a small, short handled shovel, which I think they called a lady shovel... it was small so it would fit into the fire pack. Those were the two basic things we'd use. Occasionally, if there was water available, they would drop a Pacific Marine Pumper, and you'd squirt water on the fire, and, of course, they had these little things which you wear on your back which would carry about five gallons of water, and then you had a little pump... manually operated pump. But, mostly it was digging in the dirt, building a fire line... shovel with... down to mineral soil. Then after the line is around the fire, then you go inside the fire line and you take out any fuel which is not burned and put it on the outside; if you find any burning stuff on the outside, you put it inside the fire line; you chop off the lower branches of the trees... that's called safetying
the fire, the purpose of this is to keep the ground fire from getting up in the tops, because if it gets on the tops, it can throw sparks across the fire line. And when that's done... see, first there's the line around, that's under control; then they safety the fire; and the last is the mop up... actually putting it out completely before you leave the scene of the fire.

DH Did you have to do practice fires before they sent you out?

JO Yes, there were some practice fires.

DH Did you feel any kind of apprehension about that when you first tried it?

JO No, no, because it would be a practice fire for a small crew. I remember one occasion... when was it? I think it was in the Spring of '44 at Nine Mile, and there was a practice fire which was set for one crew... and this was probably May, and it was a little bit drier than they expected and the fire did go down to the limits of the plan, so they had to get some other fellows... they very soon got the thing under control. So it didn't go quite according to plan, [LAUGH] but there was no real danger even.

DH Did you ever jump from any other bases other than up at Seeley?

JO Yeah, the procedure was different... of course, Seeley Lake was the training base for 1943, but the smokejumpers who might be going from there... they might be going from other places. The next year, the Nine Mile was the training area, but there weren't too many occasions when the planes would take off from the landing strip in that vicinity. Sometimes they would take off from Missoula, we might be... let's see the Summer of '44, I remember near the end of the Summer there was a rather extreme lightning storm, but it was accompanied by substantial amount of rain, so we figured, well, there're probably lots of fires, but they won't show up for a while. So, it was a couple of weeks later that the fires started showing up all over the place.

I remember there was one occasion when there was a... the crew there... just, I think most of all the smokejumper crew stationed at Seeley Lake got up rather early and went into Missoula by truck and then they were stationed... they stayed at the parachute loft and they were on standby all day. If they'd go to a meal, they'd go to a specific restaurant in town so we'd know where they were. And we were just kind of loafing around all day, getting kind of bored and then we got a fire call along in the evening... six or seven o'clock, I guess it was, and so we took off from the Johnson Flying Field. And... let's see, the next year I was stationed at a nursery... called Savenac Nursery, which was... oh quite a distance west of town and the Forest Service had rented a fraternity house in town. All right. So, this was where the pool of smokejumpers would be. They'd go out on a fire, then those who were stationed elsewhere... at Seeley Lake, or Nine Mile or what-not, or Savenac would come in there
and then they'd be at the bottom of the jump list and work their way up to the top, and when those had come back from a fire, unless there was the prospect of going out again immediately, then they might go back to the place from which they came. That, that's... the Summer of '45 there was quite a number of jumps one right after another, so after we came in from the outlying regions we were mostly here in Missoula.

DH Is there any one region of Montana that you liked jumping into more than any other?

JO [LAUGH] No, not particularly. It seemed to me that more frequently in '45 we were going southwest of here, down in the Selway-Bitterroot, rather than up into the other wilderness area... the Bob Marshall or the Flathead Forest. But I... again I don't... that was my own impression at the time, I don't have the statistics, I think that there were more fires down in that general direction.

DH When you were jumping, did you have a sense that what you were doing is history?

JO [LAUGH] Oh, I don't know. I didn't think too much about it, I suppose.

DH What was the food like when you'd go out onto a fire?

JO Well, we had two days of K-rations, which were not extremely tasty. They were... well, you could get along. There were a few thing contained in these that were pretty good. But the Forest Service at that time would not have the fire fighters on these K-rations for more than two days; then they'd drop good food, and if there was a sizeable number, they'd set up a fire camp. We had good food on the fires, except for those first two days. On this last fire, which was the Pentagon... twenty seven miles from the road, the Travelaire did come out once... it would be about three hours round trip from Missoula, at that time it was... I think the cost was $35.00 an hour... that's '45... you can figure out what the equivalent would be now... just to deliver groceries to us, they could drop things by parachute, including eggs, there would be a few broken [LAUGH] but we'd managed. But we hadn't estimated the length of time to mop up too carefully. We were actually getting a little bit low on grub, we didn't quite have the crust to radio into Missoula and have the plane make another drop, which they would have done if we'd asked for it. So, what I did was to hike five miles down the trail to a Forest Service cabin, which was down at the intersection of Pentagon Creek, which was a dry creek most of the year and the Spotted Bear River, and bring back some food. So I hiked the five miles down and the five miles back, brought back some canned food which was stocked in the cabin to carry... finish up our days there at the scene of the fire.

DH How did you know the cabin and food were there?
JO Well, they're marked on the maps. We had maps of the region and they marked the location of every Forest Service cabin. And, of course, the trails were all marked out on the maps.

DH Were long pack outs pretty common?

JO Yeah, this was the longest that I did, I guess... twenty seven miles. When we left, the packer had come in to pack up our tools, and jumpsuits, and sleeping bags, and so on. And when we left... we left in the afternoon one day and hiked the five miles down to this cabin... stayed over night, and then hiked the twenty two miles to the Spotted Bear Ranger Station the next day. There are various means of getting back from the fire. Once in the Bitterroots we hiked up... oh, I don't know, ten... twelve miles or so to a backwoods landing strip... Shearer, I think, is the name of the landing strip, and waited there all day and eventually the plane came in and took us out.

DH Did you have any pack outs that were a snap?

JO Well, the first fire I was on was only about four miles from the road, so it... that wasn't very much. I think at that time the Forest Service figured that a fire that's, in general, a fire four miles from a road, the cost of approaching it from the air and from the ground was about the same... plus or minus, depending upon the terrain and so on. But any fire that was twenty miles from the road, it's more economical to approach it from the air.

DH Is this a pretty physically demanding job?

JO Oh, yeah. All the persons were young and in good shape.

DH Was there a lot of physical training involved?

JO Yes, we had... in addition to the fire training we had the obstacle course, we had various thing that we would do. We would fasten our... there were some post that were in a ground, we'd fasten some straps around our legs just below the knees and bend back until we touched the ground and lift up again. And then we'd jump and turn a somersault into a net. And then there's the other thing, you'd jump off with your suits on and hit and roll. Oh, there were various things... there was practice of using climber, you know, the spurs that you fasten on your feet, because this was part of the business of retrieving a parachute sometimes. And they'd go for hikes and they'd have map training and simulated fire fighting... those kind of things.

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

JO [LAUGH] Well, I have a certain amount of nostalgia for the back country and I like to get back to it. After I taught two years at Lehigh, I returned to the West, and I taught five years at Montana State, which is closer to the back country that I like
to hike around.

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

JO No, don't think so.

DH Well, thanks for the interview.

JO OK, well thank you.

[END OF TAPE]