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JN This is an Oral History Interview with Chuck Pickard and it's taking place on the campus of the University of Montana, on the 20 of July, 1984. Chuck, the first thing I wanted to ask you is: what were you doing before your smokejumping?

CP Uh, my beginning, actually, was coming out of the Marine Corps and deciding, like many a GI in those days, whether to go to school and take advantage of the GI Bill, or whatever. And inside of three weeks, I guess I made that decision. So I went ahead and enrolled up there at the Massachusetts State College. In those days, the Cow College it was called, and I chose forestry. So, one thing led to another, during semester breaks, and we decided we'd go west... another friend of mine and myself. He was from the Connecticut Valley... a native down there, just down below Amherst. So, we went on over into Idaho and obtained Summer employment with the Forest Service over at Priest River, of all places... Priest River, Idaho. It was on the Falls Ranger District. Quite an experience for a couple of Eastern guys, but, of course, we're both ex-GIs, so we knew the, you know, we knew the routine. And naturally there was other guys over there, perhaps a little younger than us, and few a little older than us. In those days, when those Ranger Districts hire almost anybody. And it was truly a good experience... truly a good experience for those that weren't service connected, or anything, it was a good chance for gave those kids to grow up. And, of course, that theme is always followed through in the Forest Service circles; hiring young fellows and putting them to work on the forest in various capacities, whether it be repairing telephone lines up some mountain, or repairing some bridge, or piling brush, or whatever. So, I put in... we liked it so well we both put in two seasons over there... Priest River. And at that time became trusted employees, seeing as how we were forestry majors and kept out nose to the grindwheel. [LAUGH] And then, of course, we heard about those jumpers there. In fact, they jumped in on us over there a couple of times and we both decided, well, that was for us.

JN What clicked it for you? What... why did you decide that was for you?

CP Well, being short of funds in those days, we that discovered smokejumpers paid a little more. And there was good opportunity for over-time on weekends and... in fact, I had talked to one of them jumpers that had jumped in on us over there, and they gave us the low down. So immediately, before we left that year, we applied... put in application over here in Missoula for smokejumping. And, low and behold, back at college we got the opportunity to come in here in 1948. And about that time that we were ready to get out of that semester and come west again, this friend of mine, he decided he was gonna go back in the Army, with a commission. He has some little bit of specialization during
the war and they wanted him back... I don't recall what it was... but anyway, he left me and went back in the Army and I come out here by myself.

JN To be a jumper.

CP To be a jumper. Yeah, smokejumper, yeah.

JN That make you a little nervous, that you're coming by yourself then, or...?

CP Oh, no. Not really. I always had transportation. Unlike a lot of guys. I just tooled my way right back across the Mid-West and the Plains, and here I was in Missoula... starting in. That was about it. And then, of course, I stuck to it three years, yeah, yeah. Truly a great experience, yeah.

JN What was like you're first impression when you got here... as far as the outfit, what did you think of it?

CP Well, again, it all depends on attitude. You know that yourself. Coming out of the Marine Corps, you know, we were pretty semper fidelis... one for all, all for one, and do the job... get it done. And you could... you could term the smokejumper unit, with the personnel that were here at that time, as kind of like a paramilitary atmosphere. And so, again, being an ex-Marine you fall right into it. Do what you're told and, of course, it was interesting. It interested me, otherwise I wouldn't have been here. And, again, the personnel, they were good guys: Earl Cooley, as we called, Old Man Brauer, Art Cochran, all the old-time regulars...

JN Were still here in the...?

CP They had just passed through the war years and were trying to enlarge upon this project and make it worth while... with what budget they had. And, of course, we were stationed over at the old Johnson Air Field during the hot part of the season. Which I look across here right now, and I see houses over there. And they had dreams then of building a smokejumper headquarters somewhere. And consequently, we worked between what they called Nine Mile, out here west of town. That was an old Ccc camp up on the plateau, just above the Nine Mile Ranger Station and the remount station there. A real, true paradise. It was back like being in the Marine Corps again: the barracks buildings, the cook house, you know... excellent opportunity for Spring training. We had the wood landing, you know, and they'd be running sawing contests up there, all part of physical fitness for Spring training. Softball in the evening in the mid-field... the grounds were all pine studded. A real nice set-up for what it was being used for then. In fact, to this day I still say they should have never torn that down, they should still maintain an out... an out training post out there like we had at Nine Mile, yeah.

JN What's special about having that outside base, as opposed to...
having one in town here?

CP Well, it's... I... the way I look at it, it's the same old problem: you get a bunch a guys now-a-days with everything that's going on and you stick them in town, well, it opens up that opportunity, I imagine, for too much city life. So as to say. Where as out there at Nine Mile, you either proved up, or go home, you know. It didn't allow the opportunity to go downtown and drink beer... or too much beer, I should say. Things like that. And, again, I'm surprised that they ever closed Nine Mile down, for that reason. But I suppose they got to consider, you know, running the trucks back and forth, that was burning up gas and expense and all that. So anyway, they put it all in one over here. [LAUGH] Something different.

JN I've heard other people describe Nine Mile as really being a paradise, too.

CP It really was, it really was, yeah.

JN Could you go into a little more detail about what it was like out there?

CP Yeah! The regular jumpers were housed in "X" number of barracks, there. I guess those buildings must have held... oh, I don't know, probably thirty or forty men. Single bunks. And, again, you must to reiterate, it was an ex-Ccc camp. And I hold high regard for the Ccc camps, because if it wasn't for those boys, when the war came along we'd have probably been set back two more years. But all those Ccc boys were all interwoven into, again, a, kind a, of paramilitary routine, and those guys... many of them were the first to go. You know, they ended up in North Africa and everything. You know, those guys played an important part in this nation, as far as I can see. Back to the question: the actual camp itself... the cookhouse... you might say the whole organization was run like a logging camp. The boys would be woke up every morning at 6:30, or six, whatever it was... and that was one of my chores: to get them out and go through the calisthenics. And then everybody passed into the mess hall. We had the old logging camp type cooks. And boy! The food came out of there. My God! You eat all you want, you know. And then, everybody outside, line up, get assigned the duties for the day. They'd be, probably, thirty guys go up to the wood landing; they'd be five guys driving trucks; they'd be guys assigned to the filing shack, who'd be filing the cross-cut saws and sharpening the axes and the pulaski tools, you know; and all that stuff. All in anticipation of the fire season, you know. Then there was routines for so many at prescribed hours to get on the torture racks and bend over backwards and all that business... they were the canvas straps around your knees; they'd be guys assigned to the creosote plant, they were creosoting poles at that time for some of the Districts around here, apparently. They had a huge tank of creosote and a big boom to haul those pole in and out of there. When I think of it, I don't know what the environmentalist will think of it know, you know, with all
that creosote running around! [LAUGH] And there'd be guys assigned to go into town to bring out supplies... one thing, another. All at the same time, perhaps, the experienced jumpers from the year previous or two years previous perhaps, had become riggers. So they'd be a certain amount of them head on into town and they'd immediately get into the workup of the parachute packing, and the tacking, and the sewing, and all that stuff.

JN That took place in town?

CP That took place in town, yeah. They had a battery of sewing machines. And there were certain ones that were good at that, and they were always assigned that. I remember... of course, Jack Nash, he did an awful lot of sewing. He was a pretty handy old guy. And Jim Waite, the parachute technician, and Smitty the... I think we'd have to term Jim Waite as the parachute technician and Smitty would have been his assistant, more or less, and between the two of them, they'd work out any problem that anybody was having with a design or whatever, of a parachute. Because those two guys, you know, they reverted way back the Floyd Bennett Field era, when the first airplanes were landing over there, you might say, and parachute jumping was in it's infancy. So, we had good people. Again, the routine at Nine Mile was really great. And then, of course, to close out the day, all these different operations that were taking place would be switching off. There'd be a squad leader in charge of to each group and part of his job, of course, was to size up the recruits, the new ones that were coming in, not so much the repeaters, because they knew the routine and they wouldn't be there if they weren't any good the previous year. You know, they wouldn't hire them back. And then, at the end of the day, again, suppertime. And everybody showering and cleaned up and into the mess hall for another big meal. And by God, those guys use to put the food away, I'll tell you.

JN Good food?

CP Good food! Good food! I remember in later years they'd charge forty cents, or something, for a meal and that was terrible, but my God, you got your money's worth believe me, yeah. I remember the cooks, there was Brownie and I believe it was his wife who was the chief cook; Brownie acted as the bull cook. Brownie and his wife were old logging camp cooks.

JN What do you mean by bull cook?

CP Well, bull cook, of course, he had to tend the fires for the cook. And lift the heavy pots around for the cook and... he didn't have to peel potatoes because they always had a smokejumper doing that. It was just like army life, you know: you get a couple of guys out there with paring knives peeling the spuds. And so, Brownie was the bull cook, his wife was the cook. She was real nice but... and she was strict. Now, we had a way around her. I was tipped off by Jack Nash, he had know her in previous years; and if you'd get up a little bit early in the
morning and, get on over there and be kind of nice to her and, probably bring in some kindling for the wood range there, in anticipation of her starting the morning breakfast, she'd might say: "Have a cup of coffee and sit down." And the first thing you'd know, she'd put a pie or something in front of you, or doughnuts, or something like that. Yeah, nice person. And, again, her husband would be puttering around there doing odd jobs. Fulfiling the true position of the bull cook. [LAUGH] So, back to the evening meal: after everybody'd eat, of course, everybody would... or a lot of guys would turn out for softball in the mid-field. And we had some hot games there, right in the mid-field of the camp. They had the diamond set up, you know, with a backstop and everything.

And then, as time went on, during that early Spring season, a few of us, who had transportation, would team up and we'd head on down the road... you got to kind of sneak on out of camp. We didn't want the overhead, in other words, Cooley or anybody to think we were beer drinkers, or anything like that. We'd kind of sneak on out of camp and head down to the Nine Mile House. And there we'd kind of proceed to kind of unload a little bit. We'd have a few beers; and we'd play pool; and we'd play ping pong; and look at the tourists coming in... in through. Then we'd come in back up to camp. All innocent fun, but, again, being ex-GI's, we could handle a few beers... there was no problem. We never went over board on any thing like that because be believed in the tradition and the policy that the smokejumpers were following in those days.

JN Which was?

CP Which was: train these guys, get them in good physical condition... and yourself, and get ready for the fire season.

JN They didn't really approve of drinking... Earl Cooley and those fellows in...?

CP Uh, I'm quite sure that probably old Jack Nash didn't... "Mother" Nash, as we called him. Cooley, he just kind of... probably sloughed it off. And Brauer, he had no objections to it, I'm sure, but he wasn't in camp all the time. It was handled very nicely, yeah.

JN Discreetly.

CP Discreetly, yeah. Yeah, there was never any fights or anything like that. Not but what we couldn't have handled it down there. I guess you get six wild smokejumpers down there... I'll term them "wild," but dressed in logging boots and levis, drinking beer at Nine Mile Camp, there's no tourist gonna take them on, or anything like that. [LAUGH] Like you read about or see on TV, you know. Handled very nicely. So, that was Nine Mile Camp. Many of the jumpers, I'm sure, will never forget it and the routines we followed.

JN How did it compare with military training... the physical
CP Uh, I would say even heavier. I mean, we didn't go on any fifteen mile hikes. Not that the Marines ever made that a big thing as far as my personal experience was concerned in the Marine Corps. Sure, we went on five mile hikes and the smokejumpers never went for long hikes or anything like that, it was more calisthenics and work: sawing, chopping, heaving logs around, making fire wood for camp, whatever other chores. There was one particular chore that a number of us had been on and we didn't cherish it too well. And that was being assigned... probably a half a dozen of us, being assigned down at the remount station. And that would be hay bailing in the early Spring. Oh, man, that was miserable. You know, that old Spring sun would be beating down on you and you'd be up on top of a hay stack pitching hay in that bailer down there. Oh, my God. Your eyes were bleeding and you were itching. Oh, that was terrible. And I don't know if Old Man Brauer, perhaps, picked out a few guys to take on that job quite regularly... I don't recall. I was down there about twice, not as any punishment or anything, but I just happened to ended... end up down there. That haying was new to me, being an Easterner. So I learned a how to bail hay anyway. [LAUGHTER] Quite an experience.

JN It was all useful work, though, it wasn't stuff you were just being... busy work or anything.

CP No. Not like what you'd hear from military life. Right, it all had a purpose. And most of it, again, had to be physical... the purpose was physical, get these guys into condition. Because jumping, you know, out in these forests, as romantic as it sounds, it could have been hellish dangerish, depending on where you're landing, you know. Well, the experiences of the smokejumpers will tell you that. The smokejumper project has been very lucky. I don't know whether it was because of the choice of the people they've hired, or the training that these older guys gave them... forming the nucleus for later year's trainings. You know, they had a hell of a good nucleus there, I mean to tell you. Some of the other guys that weren't regulars... the term regulars, but who had been there since right immediately after the war like... guys like... oh, let me think here. Some of these names... Dobbins, he was a squad leader when I came there. I forget what his major was, but... and I don't recall whether he attended this university here or back East somewhere. And Dobbins and that group there... gee, again, I can't remember the names. That was all part of that nucleus, being... having been trained by Cooley and Brauer and Bill Woods, those carry overs from the war. And, all together, that did the job. Good guys.

JN What kind of relationship did you have to those... that core of guys? Where they people you looked up to, and was there a distinction between you and them, or were they pretty much on your equal after you got to know them, or what?
They were pretty much on your equal after you got to know them. But, again, their experience kept popping up. They had the answer to most of it. And, I mean, when I look at it from my personal standpoint, from my military background and stuff like that... but consider a raw, Eastern kid in his first or second year of college back East coming out here. Well, you had to have guys like that that knew what the hell they were talking about, you know? I had a pretty good notion of what was going on, because it interested me and I bothered to find out some of these answers, but those guys would back you up with the same answer. Yeah, yeah. That was Nine Mile Camp in those days. [CHUCKLE]

What was your training jumps like? Did you ever jump before, in the military?

I never... no I wasn't a jumper. I was strictly an artillery man in the Marine Corps in the Pacific Campaigns. I had no parachute background behind me. To be more specific, on the first jumps... it wasn't the first jumps that bothered me, it was the second one: I knew what to be scared of! [LAUGH] you know. I don't know how many guys can say "Oh, that's duck soup." and bail out of that plane. Man. your heart pumps a little bit, you know. I tried to treat it as to become routine and the last year I was jumping it really didn't bother me that... of course, you heart pumped and it still pumped. But after awhile, you know, you lean out of that plane and look around down there and say: "Let's go!" and out you you go... away forever. [LAUGH] I never had a malfunction, either. Yeah, yeah. In fact, it didn't bother me so much... it bothered me so little, I should say, that I went ahead and bought an outfit from Smith. Smith made up private outfits, you know, for free falling. And there was... here's another nucleus: Dave Burt and Jack Nott and myself and a fellow by the name of Harpole and a young native from down south of here, I think his name was Skeezix. Well, we all bought private parachute outfits. And we were out here jumping on weekends in front of everybody and they begin to call us skyjumpers... or whatever, you know. And, of course, I don't need to tell you what's happened in all these years: everybody's skyjumping now, you know.

You did that just because you really got into the jumping?

Kind of got into it, yeah. And that crazy Jack Nott, he was from over there in Bozeman. And between he and Dave Burt, they were the experts on it. They'd get up there at 3,000 feet and fall free half the distance, or whatever, and pop the chute, you know. And then they got on to the smoke routine with these smoke bottles on their legs. And, you know, the stuff you see on TV advertising Budweiser, or whatever. [LAUGH] You know. So, the six of us, we put on pretty good shows over here at the old Johnson Air Field in those days, yeah... on weekends. And, of course, Jack Nott and Dave Burt, they were leaving Missoula on the weekends to jump at rodeos in the surrounding area around here. One hundred bucks a whack, you know, yeah.
JN So somebody was sponsoring this, too.

CP Yeah, sure. And for myself, now, when I went back East, though, I carried that outfit along and I was jumping in the East, making myself a hundred... a hundred and a half per jump, yeah. I was jumping as Santa Claus, I know, around Christmas times, yeah. Put on a full Santa Claus suit with a big pillow in there and jump out. And all the people waving, [CLAPPING] clapping—hundred and a half. [LAUGH] I was jumping back there on cranberry bogs. Now, you talk about a real cushion landing, you've never jumped... I'm probably the only one that ever jumped on a cranberry bog. And if you know cranberry bogs, they got about twelve... fifteen inches of close-knit vines. And these cranberry bogs are perfectly flat with small dikes around them, with six inches of water in them to irrigate those cranberries. And man, when you come down on a cranberry bog, it was just like laying into a tub of feathers. Oh, beautiful! And then they'd get up and interview you, you know, and... a true novelty in those days back East. [LAUGH] I remember Smith had rigged me up a camouflage parachute, it was an old military chute, with all the green, you know, the mottled green... the camouflage outfit. Mine was that way. Of course, Dave Burt and Jack Nott, they got real modern: they got themselves multi-colored chutes, you know, and all that. They were the Esquire in the West as far as jumping [LAUGH] on weekends.

JN How'd those guys at the base, like Earl Cooley and Brauer feel about that type of exhibitionism? Did they approve or...?

CP I don't think they liked it too much. I don't know whether it was because notoriety or what. I don't know. They didn't look upon that too much as far as with the smokejumper background, see. Because they realized that if some crazy daredevil like one of us got ourselves hurt, it would reflect back on the project. But I guess with Jim Waite and Smitty, being part of the project in the overhead category... Smitty and... particularly Smitty. Smitty and Waite, though, any young fellow that wanted to parachute jump: "Fine! Let me show you how, and what kind of parachute do you want?" Because they had their infancy in that... out in the Far West, you know, over around Floyd Bennett Field and everything. Yeah.

JN So they loved it.

CP They loved it, yeah. I can see Smitty up there twinkling when one of us would go out, you know. [LAUGH] Jim Waite was a little more reserved. I don't know whether Jim Waite and Smitty are around or not. Since I've got over here to Missoula now this time I haven't heard their names. But hopefully they're still alive. I'll look forward to seeing them. Yeah, yeah. [LAUGH]

JN I couldn't tell you. So, after you went through that training... sounds like you enjoyed the training pretty much, it wasn't...
CP  Looked forward to it. Just like the joggers look forward to getting out and running every morning.

JN  Was that a build up to a fire jump, or was that in itself, you know, exciting enough?

CP  It was exciting enough for me. Of course, being the ultimate, a build up to an actual fire jump and perform the service, yeah. Which you were being paid for.

JN  And being paid well?

CP  Well, in those days it was pretty well, yeah. Particularly if you got out on a larger fire or a fire on a weekend. They termed government work, you know, forty hours and anything over forty hours was time and a half. And I don't recall whether you were paid double time on Sundays or not... I don't think it was, I think it was straight time and a half for anything over forty. And if you could make your fire carry through until Monday morning, at eight o'clock, your regular time would start again. So it was a money situation and those were big bucks to us single guys in those days, you know. Yeah. At least for those of us that were ex-GIs. I'm not talking about the regular students that were jumpers, you know. We were looking for the bucks. [LAUGH]

JN  Was there any of distance between you and the college kids... the GIs and the vets?

CP  There was... I recall a few instances. We had a couple of ex-paratroopers from time to time that showed up. And I remember one in particular. He was a little bit hard to retrain. He was an Army paratrooper and... of course those guys had had good training in the military and, perhaps, their outlook on such training was a little... I don't know, a little nil, compared, you know, the two. And... but I remember this particular one that caused a few problems, probably more oral problems than anything.

JN  Just harassing...?

CP  Back talk or something like that, yeah. But he worked out. I don't think he ever came back more than one season, though. But again, strange as it may seem, we didn't have an awful lot of ex-paratroopers. There was a few showed up during my years there, but... you'd thought, you know, after the war you'd had a bunch of them coming through here, you know.

JN  I was just wondering, like, with the college kids what was their relationship with you guys that were ex-GIs?

CP  I would have to say that the non-GIs, through the choice of choosing particular ones, to work on the project or to become smokejumpers were smart enough to keep their mouths shut, so they didn't cause any problems between the GIs and themselves. I
think they were smart enough. And again, here we go with forestry majors again, they were a particular breed. Perhaps we could have termed them in those days, part of them were much... environmentalists. Yeah. I'd have to say that the theme was in that way, you know. And most of them weren't out there shooting off their mouth about certain things. So there was no particular friction between the GIs and the non-GIs.

JN You guys hang-out together?

CP Hang-out together somewhat. Other than the private cliques, now. Like guys like that Barnowsky and myself and that dirty Thorsrud, and a few others I'd like to name. [LAUGHTER]

JN And they had their own clique?

CP We had our own clique. [LAUGHTER] We certainly did.

JN What would you do?

CP Well, we were the ring leaders, you might say in those years. We determined... myself in particular I says: "We ought to do something around here, you know, in Missoula." So... I don't know whether it was Cooley or Nash, I think it was Cooley that come in and said: "Well, Pickard, why don't you arrange some kind of a dance or something?" "Oh! Good idear! Let's have a dance." So, we inherited the job of arranging and putting on a dance for the smokejumpers in downtown Missoula. With Cooley's backing, and I don't think everybody in that overhead went for that; but after it came out and it worked well, oh, it was accepted. And the Moose Club down there, bless their souls... Moose Clubs have always been good to people, it seems like. They allowed us the use of their hall and we put on a giant smokejumper dance. And we tried to recruit, and we were successful in getting all kinds of Missoula girls to attend! And here this dance takes place. We had tickets printed with the wings and the parachute, you know, "Smokejumper dance in downtown Missoula." And Smitty and Waite and the rest of them, they arranged to get a bunch of old parachutes all hanging up in the roof and the ceiling, you know. And we got a band. I remember there was some question about: what are gonna drink? I don't remember, but it seems like we had a big bowl of punch or something, I can't remember. I just don't remember how we got over the liquor angle, but we got over it with no problem. Maybe everybody was told: "Now gol'darn, you better behave! You know, don't overdo it." And we had these dances... I think we put them on two years in a row there once. I remember I had some tickets some years back, but I must have... I couldn't find them to bring them up here. I had some of the old smokejumper dance tickets that I had saved, yeah, yeah.

JN So was it a... did the community play it up too in the papers and stuff?

CP Yeah, we had publicity in the paper and all the local girls
attended, it was just like a USO function, you know, only smokejumpers in charge. [LAUGHTER] And again, when we didn't do something like that, we usually stopped at the Flame Lounge when we were in town. And there was a bartender there named Chet. Obviously passed on now, because he was pretty tall, grey-haired and stately in those days. He didn't take too much gob from any of us. Not that we caused any trouble, but Barnowsky and I were in there pretty regularly, drinking what they call G-Balls. Now, G-Balls apparently are bar whiskey with golden type, not dry, ginger ale. It was golden ginger ale, as I recall, and whiskey... bar whiskey. And they were about fifty cents, I think. And they came in one of those four inch glasses. Boy! Could you put those down. And you'd get a glow on that was marvelous... with those G-Balls. In between times, of course, we were playing the slot machines off the bar stools. And perhaps after being in there an hour of two, here would come Thorsrud. Now, Thorsrud was Norwegian heritage, and he was local in Missoula. And he had a brother that was a carpenter... a part-time carpenter, who also flew these old BT... TBM's... these old torpedo bombers. Apparently he had flown them during the war... I'm sure that's the case, because he flew them when we first started to put in the soft water project, over here. And Johnson Flying Service had bought a bunch of them and they were spraying the soft water on the hot spots on these big fires. Well, Thorsrud's brother was one of those. He tried to get... he did get a small contract with Johnson to fly them. And so, anyway, here comes Thorsrud into the bar and Fred Barnowsky and I are sitting there. Fred had looked around... Fred was a quiet guy, I called him Gary Cooper. And he had many of the personal traits of Gary Cooper. He's turn around and he'd say: "Hi." [LAUGHTER] That's all he'd ever say. And Thorsrud is standing up behind him: "Give me a G-Ball there, Chet." And he'd throw on down, and all the time his eyes were flashing: "Were's all the girls?" He was a girl... what do they call them now? A girl... they have a name for it... a real girl chaser, you know. And if there wasn't any...

JN Womanizer. Womanizer?

CP Womanizer! Thorsrud was a true womanizer. I'm sure you'd get that from Thor... Barnowsky or anybody else that knew him that well. So, if there wasn't any action in there, Thorsrud would say, "Let's go on up the Depot." Or some place like that. And if we didn't want to go, Thorsrud would leave... he'd take off, go out on his own. But he always like company, so he always tried to get us to go with him. So, then, of course, Fred and I we'd sit around enough. If there was no activity around there, we'd head on up to the Depot, and go up to the Silver Dollar Bar. Or one thing or another up on the North End. And I remember... this is an interesting story: there was a bar up there called the Silver Dollar Bar... I don't know whether it's still there or not. It was over on the back... one the west streets up there, in back of the Park Hotel, or whatever. And it was right on the corner, and as you'd go in there... let's start at the beginning. As you'd approach the bar, you'd hear this cowboy music, and
there on the corner would be these old lumber jack types... I mean old guys. With a steel guitar and maybe a banjo, or whatever, playing on the sidewalk there in front of the Silver Dollar Bar. Best music in the world I've ever heard. These old guy beating out that music... especially a steel guitar, a good one. And then, as you'd passed through to the Silver Dollar Bar, if the bartender wasn't busy, he pulled a rope and there'd be a big bell ring, and you'd go in. Boy. Now that had a lot of interest, that bar did. That was some bar.

JN A lot of lumberjacks?

CP Lumberjacks, rail road people, ranchers, down-and-outs, you name it. And smokejumpers! Quite a bar, yeah.

JN Did most of the smokejumpers end up hitting the bars pretty much? Or just a group.

CP No! Just a group. And that term: "hit the bars," we hit them, but we could handle it. There was no problem with us. No problem with us, I mean, you know. We weren't drunkards by any matter, or means.

JN You didn't lose it.

CP We didn't lose it. Never lost it.

JN Didn't get into any fights or anything?

CP No, no, no. Never any problem with us. We could handle it... Barnowsky and I... we could handle it, yeah. Nobody was ever drunk. I don't know, I guess we were all in better physical condition those days... didn't bother us. [LAUGHTER] But man! We put down the G-Balls, now... yeah.

JN You mentioned something interesting to me about... you say you put in a soft water project: what was that? Was that something you did as smokejumpers?

CP Well, part of the... part of the scientific minds in the Forest Service decided that this diluted water, you know, with the chemicals in it... I don't know who made it in those days. It probably wasn't Phillips 66. [LAUGH] But whoever made the stuff, they mixed it into tanks... oh, somewhere there. Now... am I mixing this up? Let me think here. I'm trying to think whether we had soft water in those days... yeah, I'm sure we did. It must have been in it's infancy because I remember Thorsrud's brother flying those old PBMs.

JN TBM, again, is a...?

CP The torpedo boat... the old Navy torpedo bombers.

JN And they carried water, now?
They carried water. Now, the only... if I'm wrong on my time plane on that... if we didn't have it up until '50, when I left the smokejumper project, which is a possibility we didn't... I ran into it on a visit when I came over here in about... I don't know, in the '50's... later '50's I took a vacation and drove up here to see some of these old buddies of mine, and maybe it was there. I can't quite remember. I don't remember. You'd have to research that, find out when the first soft water was sprayed in, yeah. Anyway, they mixed it all together, you know, in these batching tanks over there and the plane would drive up and they'd pump the tanks full. And they were outfitted, you know, with tanks, and zoom--zoom--zoom! You'd think it was a damn Naval air raid when those things were taking off.

JN Was that part of your project work, then, to help them with that, or...?

CP No, as far as I know not. Again, you would have to clarify that with the overhead that I stayed... I didn't have anything to do with it, I know, but whether there was a couple of jumpers over there helping mix that stuff, I don't remember. [LAUGH] I don't remember, I wasn't any part of it.

JN But, would they fly with you out on fires when you'd jump. Would they fly in and dump that water?

CP With them? I never had it on any of my fires, and, again, on my time element, I'm not sure whether they were experimenting with it in other locations to the west... in the other Regions, or what. I never had it come down on me. Yeah. You'd have to find out when they first started to drop that soft water, yeah.

JN Uh-huh. Doing a lot of experimenting back in those days, huh?

CP Yes they were. They were trying all kinds of stuff. They had such experiments as with the trenchers... portable trenchers that you could drop in, you know, and...

JN What's a portable trench?

CP Ah, it was like a glamorized wheelbarrow, or a baby carriage, or whatever. It had an engine on it and it was nothing more than a... what do you call these things that you dig up your garden with?

JN A roto-tiller?

CP A roto-tiller! It was like a... some kind of roto-tiller. And I never... I remember trying one out somewhere. Bill Woods, of course, was assigned to these development projects, along with other... well, let's say, other scientific means... minds. And they kept coming up with these things. And I remember they tried to develop that, and I think they did. And, in fact, I think they had chains on it, or something, once. I tried it out...
tested it once for some of them, and...

JN  What did you think of it? Did it work at all?

CP  Oh, it had possibilities, yeah. But nothing that a good roto-tiller wouldn't do today, I would imagine. If they could... if they could, you know, change a roto-tiller over to digging a narrower ditch, or something, I suspect you could put in a lot of fire line with it. Maybe they're using it today. I haven't been over to the project to find out what's been developed, yeah.

JN  But it didn't catch back then for some reason.

CP  Well, either that, or they didn't have enough of them made. They hadn't... let's put it this way: they hadn't let out one of those juicy government contracts to produce 10,000 of them. [LAUGH] They were kind of crude: they'd get some welder downtown, probably, to put something together and then they'd bring it out to the smokejumper camp and let us try it. I remember we were testing... we were testing chainsaws in those days. Now, that was interesting. You know, everybody owns a chainsaw now, but they come out with these great, big McCullochs... they must have weighed eighty pounds. And then they come out with a Disten... Disten, apparently, made one. And I forget what other brands, there was nothing like Homelight, as far as I remember. But I remember Disten and McCulloch. Fred Barnowsky and I, and one or two others, were assigned up on the wood landing to test those things out... to see which ones sawed best, I guess. And they had those great big curled chains on them... you filed with a great big round file... the teeth on them. And, of course, in later years they changed the teeth, you know... those big cupped teeth. Ah... oh, that was the beginning of it.

JN  Did that help out you guys on fires... on actual fires, or just testing?

CP  Well, while I was jumping they never, again, let out any juicy contracts to furnish the Forest Service with chainsaws. [LAUGHTER] You know, so we never had them, yeah.

JN  Did that help out you guys on fires... on actual fires, or just testing?

CP  Crosscut all the way... pulaski tool and crosscut saw, yeah. Yeah. Even in those early days they did away with those wet tanks on your back, though. That was always a waste of time, you know, those tanks. You squirt that water, you know. We called them "piss tanks."

JN  They didn't do anything?

CP  Nah, that was pre-war year stuff, I guess, yeah. It was a pulaski tool, hard work and a shovel. That's how you get the fires out. If you could hold it during the day-time when you had some wind and so forth... if you could hold it there and then fight fire all night long, by morning all you had was a smoking
mess, if you had enough jumpers. And, of course, the jumpers would do the work of any other man, you know. The smokejumpers were semper fidelis. They just worked like hell. [LAUGH] They don't work any ground crew.

JN Really. They out do even the hot-shot crews?

CP Uh, I would have to say so, yeah... eager. You take small, you know, like a three man crew jumping on a fire... five acre... six acre fire, they'd have that thing out in no time, you know. Yeah, work like hell.

JN Real pride there in being able to do that?

CP Real pride, yeah, yeah. You know, as I look back on those days, probably the most important thing we could have had in those days was a decent radio. And today, you know, you see these guys, maybe a construction worker, he's got this walkie-talkie on his belt and he's talking to somebody forty miles away. Communications. They dropped these big old radios to us... they never worked! I never saw one work! Big old bulky packer radio, you know, and they never worked. [LAUGH] But if we had walkie-talkies, you know, so you could talk to the plane or something...

JN What would you... how would that have helped?

CP Oh... maybe: "How you doing up there?" [LAUGHTER] Maybe you'd say: "Drop us another can of water, it's hot as hell down here." You know, stuff like that, yeah.

JN Or send some more cargo?

CP Yeah, yeah. "Send some more help in here." You know, or something, you know. Not that we had any trouble with the streamers, you know, you could put out the signals. If you needed anything, they'd drop it. But just the fact that if you could have communications, would have meant a lot, yeah. I suppose they got these radios now. You'd probably be on a fire on the Salmon River and talk to the dispatcher in Missoula, I don't know, I suppose. Crazy days.

JN That was the biggest thing that you could see that, technically, that would have helped: if you had better communication?

CP Yeah, yeah, yeah.

JN Anything else that you think about the outfit that you didn't like, or that you would have done differently back then?

CP Well, if we could have had more fires in certain years it would have helped, but... [LAUGHTER] No, not really. There isn't much they could have improved upon and even today, if comes back to hard work, you know. I know they're using a lot of helicopters over here, I guess. But, that's fine, if where they
put you down is not too far to the fire. I mean, nobody wants to walk five mile to fight the fire, I'd rather parachute in, you know, and get close to it. Again, I haven't been out there, I don't know what the procedures are now. They can't improve on hard work, though. That's it, hard work.... sweat and toil.

JN  Was it a let down when you didn't get very many fires?

CP  Uh, yeah. It was a little disheartening as far as the pocket book was concerned. Yeah, yeah. But, again, it was Summer work at regular pay, so, I mean, you had a chance to earn some money. That's what counts. A lot of those guys depended on that to go back to school, you know. I wasn't ever in that much of a financial bind. Of course, I used the money that I earned out here to traverse back and forth to school... etcetera, etcetera, you know. I had transportation problems; as far as these guys attending the University of Montana, all they had to do is drive over and go to work. I had to come, you know, a couple of thousand miles. But, of course, gas was eighteen cents in those days. [LAUGH] So it wasn't bad.

JN  Did you have any COs at that time? Where there any conscientious objectors left over... that stuck with it after the war?

CP  As far as I know, no, I didn't... see, I started in '48, if there was, they probably were still around in '46 and '47. I had no contact with them that I can remember. But I'll tell you one thing: in talking with the old timers about them... of course, they told us some of their experiences... those that weren't in the service... the overhead guys, they said they didn't have any trouble with them. Hell, they were as good a workers, if not better, than anybody else. You know, again, their certain belief, and, of course, we see that in television dramas today or movies, or one thing or another. You know, we've... we're open now, you know, we accept all these things and a conscientious objector, just because his beliefs at that time... I imagine that a lot of them have changed their ways, too. They probably don't object to as much as they use to. Let's say, old country habits and styles... immigrant status people...

[END OF SIDE A]

[SIDE B]

CP  ... was name there. He was a conscientious objector during the war. Was his name Adaire? Or something... whatever. He's appeared in many movies and after the war, of course, he was kind of looked down upon but gradually, you know, as people and the ways and habits and the world changes, they disregarded his objections to fighting. He's accepted today, just like a re-born alcoholic, or something, you know. Nah, no problem with those conscientious objectors after the war.

JN  Let's see... towards the end of your jumping experience, did
you notice any changes that happened then... since the beginning?

CP Oh, no... not really. Equipment development. Everything they developed as an improvement was certainly an asset to the project.

JN Like what... what improvements? Can you name...

CP Maybe they changed a few parachutes, or something like that, to make them steer easier. Again, that was parachute technology. Right up until '50, though... during my years, '48, '49, and '50... of course we did develop that wheel... Bill Woods developed that wheel stretcher. Now, that was a definite asset for jumpers being injured out in the woods... in the forests. And we proved that, you know, in... I think it was '49. When that Davis, he was a big game hunter from Missouri that was up here and he was down in the Selway-Bitterroot forest. And the reason I mention this, because I brought up some pictures which your girl in the other room is going over. I had thrown my camera in and took pictures of that rescue. And Davis was on a packing trip with some guides down in the Bitterway... Bitterroot-Selway area and he became lost. And after, I don't know, one or two days, or something, they finally called the smokejumper project. They wanted to know if they could get some guys down there to help find him. So, they exercised their right by asking for volunteers. And I think there was fourteen of us volunteered. And I bought along a picture of us suiting up over at the airport getting ready to board the plane, and a couple more pictures of the camp that we set up. Herb Oertli and I... we were both squad leaders, I believe... or whatever, anyway, we said: "Well, this is one fire scene, or rescue scene that were not gonna starve to death." None of the smokejumpers could cook, but at least I could boil an egg, so Herb Oertli and I said: "Let's do the cooking for this crew." So we did the cooking. So, anyway, we jumped in there an we... Brauer was in on that, I think, and I know Bill Woods was, because he was anxious to see how that stretcher worked. There was a collapsible wheel that would collapse up if you had to cross a log, or something. He had extension handles on it so that you could put... two... four... about eight guys carrying it over rough terrain. And... a litter basket type thing... and so we laid out a grid system in the area where this hunter was lost and I think after two or three days, we found him.

JN Just one? Just an individual?

CP Just an individual, yeah. He was an elderly man, and I think we found his rifle... it was separated from him. A typical story that you read in the newspaper. And he had been without water, or whatever. He was semi-conscious, though. We got him into camp and we...

JN On the stretcher? Did you use the stretcher?

CP I remember if it was on the stretcher... probably was. And
we broke camp then and got our routines worked out for carrying this stretcher. We had a system where we'd rotate by either falling back, I think it was. Bill Woods had this all worked out: we'd fall back from the beginning, let the stretcher go by us, and then we'd get some rest, and then take up a position on the back handles of it and those guys would either be relieved and fall back, or move up to the front part, or whatever. We had this routine worked out. And it was a huge success. We carried that old boy, I think, thirteen or fourteen miles.

JN To a trailhead or something?

CP To a trailhead or a road... a logging road or something. I don't re... I'm foggy on the other end of it. But anyway, we got him out with no problem. And no scars. I think somebody sprained their ankle... one jumper on that. But it was no problem. A successful operation. We got him back to Missoula and he was brought up to the hospital there and he recovered. It was a well run rescue mission thanks to Bill Woods. And I think old man Brauer was on that.

JN Did you do much of that rescue... did smokejumpers do much of that type of rescue work?

CP Uh, again, it was in it's infancy. That was the only one that I participated on, but I'm sure in later years it probably became pretty routine because jumpers were the best guys in the world suited to find somebody out there in that forest. We had routines; we had supervision; we were woods-wise; and you probably couldn't find a more elite crew than smokejumpers to perform an operation like that. Anywhere in the nation, for that matter, I guess. [LAUGHTER] Because everybody in those days, you know, was anti-war and they disbanded everything. The only good outfit was the smokejumpers out here. [LAUGH]

JN How was... everybody in those days were anti-war?

CP No.

JN Well, maybe I misunderstood you. What'd you say: "was at the war"? No...

CP Well, let's see... go back track on... What was the...?

JN You said you were the only guys out here, everybody...

CP Well, again, in those days, of course, everything was being disbanded, you know. You know, there was... the name of the game when then was; let everybody out of the army, I suppose, and disband, and stockpile the weapons, and everything, you know. And here's the smokejumpers out here, and this nucleus out here training to do that kind of work. You know, fighting the common enemy: forest fires. [LAUGHTER]

JN So, there was something going on there, just in terms... in
the country as far as... like packing up the weapons, not training as many people, and stuff.

CP Right! Yeah, typical after-the-war situation, just like after the subsequent wars, you know.

JN Want to forget about it all.

CP Forget about it all, yeah,

JN What'd you guys think about it that were GIs that'd come through the war?

CP Well, I'm a Hawk, really. I believe in it. Reagan and I are the best of buddies. [LAUGHTER] His beliefs seem to be... go along with myself, and, I think, the majority of the nation.

JN See... so, at that time... what I'm wondering is: you saw that happening, did that really upset you guys that people were forgetting the military?

CP No. I was too young to even think that much about it. Most of us guys in this parachute project, we didn't think much about government. Naturally, we laughed about perhaps, a few of the policies of the Forest Service. You know [LAUGH] we'd say: "What in the hell do they want that thing rebuilt for?" You know? "That's a waste of time." [LAUGH] But we'd do it. Either that or we tore something down... I don't know. We'd go up to Seeley Lake on a little project and build a pole barn. Well, that was fine, except that there wasn't any mules or anything. They didn't need a barn up there, they just wanted to have it there in case there was a fire up there and the remount could put mules up there, I guess. I don't know. Odds and ends like that, you know, just small stuff... small potatoes.

JN You didn't have any basic disagreements with the Forest Service and how they managed... handled things?

CP No, no, no. In those days, they still had the old corps, you know. Guys like Fred Fite and those old rangers on these Districts: "High-pockets" Higgins down at Dixie, and you know, you'd run into some damn fine people in the Forest Service still performing their jobs from pre-World War II days. Hellish good rangers, yeah. Good people, yeah. I remember there was one over on the Kaniksu, he later became Forest Supervisor and I guess he probably went further up in the organization... Hy Lyman. He had legs about six foot long... hell of a good man, yeah... good man.

JN What made you a good man as far as a smokejumper? What... what's the best... describe the best smokejumper, or the ideal smokejumper at that time.

CP Uh, I probably would have to say: a guy who's not afraid of work. He made the best smokejumper. Now, I was jumping with a bunch of guys then... a bunch, I say, at least a half a dozen...
eight or ten... they were localized boys that never had the first shred of college education. Guys from down around Hamilton and Dillon, and locations like that. They grew up around here. Perhaps their parents owned a ranch or small ranch or whatever. Or they were just plain stump farmers, I don't know what. They came from these local areas around here. They were hellish good guys. They were woods-wise; they'd hunted since they were knee high, I suppose, in these forest up here. And, maybe... maybe one or two guys of Indian decent. I remember this one... Anywaush, [Francis] although I think he was from the Chippewah Tribe over in Minnesota. He had migrated over here after the war. I don't remember if he was a GI or not. And his best buddy was a guy by the name of Norm Watkins, he was from up around Kalispell. And they always were teamed up together, it seemed like. And Anywaush, being of Indian heritage, hellish good guy in the woods. Boy, it was a pleasure to have him around on a fire.

JN How did that show up? Can you name...?


JN Not complaining...

CP Never complaining. Hell, no! Never complained, nah. Good guys. And again, these local boys... same way: hard working, husky kids. Do what they were told, and not a lot of words necessary to tell them. They probably looked at some of us guys form the East, you know, even though we were GIs and one thing and another, they probably looked at us and had different versions. But it didn't take long, we worked out any problems, and boy, they did the job. Good guys.

JN Did you feel like... when you first came out here, did you feel like a greenfoot in the woods or...?

CP Well, with my forestry background back in Massachusetts in the New England forests and some saw milling experience while going to school back East, and then working a couple of seasons over on the Kaniksu over at Priest River, it certainly wasn't new to me, yeah.

JN How about some of the other guys in the... first year, new men coming in, do they have trouble getting...?

CP Pretty tender-foot... pretty tender-foot, yeah. But, again, the quality of the overhead here... and I was trained by the overhead here. Again, we come back to the old names: Brauer, Cooley, Bill Woods, Smith, and Waite, Art Cochran, guys like Barnowsky, to work with. But tenderfoots soon caught on. They were smart enough to keep their mouth shut and try to learn. And again, if they were forestry majors, they were already told back in college: they didn't know a lot, keep your mouth shut, and
listen. So they fitted into the project. And, of course, a lot of those guys... again, they were choosing them down in the Federal Building down here: they'd wait until they maybe worked on a district one or two years, like in my case. I came from the Kaniksu.

JN So they had experience. They didn't pick them raw.

CP I had experience, yeah, both fighting fire and regular District work, yeah. Yeah, yeah.

JN It caught my ear when you said that there's a certain trend... some of these foresters towards being conservationists or environmentalists. Did you pick up on that back then, and how did it show up?

CP Uh, no two colleges treat the same... teach the same kind of forestry. I had... I formed an opinion on how a forest should be tended back East and which certainly didn't apply to the Western forest.

JN What was that opinion? Just out of curiosity.

CP Well, we were more prudent in the East in maintaining a forest. Again, we were talking a hardwood forest. And...

JN More cautious about fires, you mean by prudent?

CP Oh no, not necessarily. I mean just the practice of forestry. How should a forest be treated. What you should cut and what shouldn't you cut. Of course, today, you have to look upon it as what the market wants. They want lumber for housing and housing is down. I don't believe in shipping logs to Japan. [LAUGH] I don't believe in exporting our timber. And I don't like to see southern slopes cut off. And I've seen some of it here, since I've been here in two days.

JN So, you're saying that actually back then, people were more concerned about the forest itself and less politics as far as... well, ship logs to Japan or the market's now determining practices?

CP Yeah. Yup, practices... forest practices. There's any number of books... as you know, labeled... the name of the book is: Forest Principles and Practices. [LAUGH] How to Log, Silviculture etcetera, etcetera... there's hundreds of books... every professor wrote a book. [LAUGH] How to Treat the Forests. How Keep It Growing for Our Children.

JN Was that practiced or was that just...?

CP Well, I guess they tried to, but, of course, again now, we come back to the old rangers and stuff who were in charge of their districts. And, no doubt, they were questioned as to what tracts should be cut. They had forestry training, although their
forest training was, perhaps, back in colleges that taught courses that weren't up to date in later years. Today we have all these... this renewal education in every profession. Even my wife, who's a hair dresser... a professional hair dresser, they make her go to school twenty-four hours or forty eight hours once a year to come back up to date on new chemical compounds for the hair. Well, now I don't know if the foresters have to go back to school, or rather, District Rangers have to go back to school and get caught up on new forest practices. I don't know. I hope they do. [LAUGH] So, again, treatment of the forests: everybody has their own ideas, no two foresters will agree. Now, back in Minnesota they're clear-cutting these 40s and 80s and 160s and so forth, looking for poplar to come back up, because that's the market over there... the paper companies, etcetera... pulp. Poplar of all things. Where as those forests really belong to the evergreen species... Norway Pine, White Pine, etcetera. If it wasn't for some of those companies, I guess, you wouldn't have any forests over there, because they do have pretty good replanting program. But they clear-cut the hell out of them, hoping that this poplar will sprout up. And then they get in after so many years, I suppose, and thin it out again and hope for a crop in thirty years, I don't know.

JN Were... if you'd compare the forestry practices that you grew up with back then, with what's going on today, what changes have you seen, you think?

CP The changes I've seen is they clear-cut too much of it.

JN Now.

CP Now. To fit the market.

JN They're a little carefuller back then.

CP Yeah... yeah, I'd have to say that... I'd have to say that. Yeah. Of course, you've got these big monopolies. Now, here in Missoula, I look at the Intermountain Sawmill down here, it's been taken over by Champion. The Smokey Waldorf plant out here, been taken over by Champion. The Bonner Mill... Champion. Now here we got those big conglomerates, again. And, you know, when you reach a conglomerate of that size, you end up with one of the Department of Agricultural men... top men having lunch with the director of the Champion company. And he says: "Were out of timber!" And he says: "Oh, really? How much would you want? [LAUGH] And he says: "Well, we got about ten square miles over there west of Missoula we want to cut over there on National Forest." "OK!" I mean, I don't know... I'm sure it doesn't happen that big, but when you reach that big, you kind of control these tracts of land, you know? Not to mention the railroads... every other tract belongs to them.

JN So, one of the things that was different back then was you had good foresters and... were responsible for their section of the woods, or was it...?
CP Yeah. They were questioned by the overhead before some of these timber sales were made. I suppose it's cut and dried now with all the aerial photography, he just calls that Ranger up and says: "According to our photograph, we're gonna cut that section." "OK." [LAUGH] I don't know.

JN What about the "let burn" policy? How does that strike you?

CP "Let burn policy?"

JN Yeah, were, for instance a Park or a National Forest will... there'll be a lightning strike fire and they'll say: "OK, let her burn. You know, it was meant to... there's too much fuel build up and forest fire's part of the natural system, so where gonna let this fire burn." Familiar with that?

CP If that is part of a policy, which you're probably speaking of, I haven't heard of it; and I can't believe it. I don't believe in it.

JN OK. Some... it's... it is part of a policy now. Parks do it, let a fire burn... Yellowstone Park will do it, and control burn, too, that's another....

CP Control burn is another thing. We even practiced that, but it was, you know, small areas... very small areas.

JN So there was control burn back then.

CP Oh, yes.

JN What was the thinking behind that?

CP Uh, apparently unwanted species had sprouted up in, perhaps, a cut over area... nine times out of ten, that's probably what it was. And they'd arrange a control burn to get rid of the junk. Again, I term "junk". I don't mean forest litter, I'm talking about unwanted species. Being away from it so long, I can't name the species that they didn't want. On a... let's say a White Pine suited terrain. I couldn't say, but they did have control burn, yeah. And a good many of them got out of hand. [LAUGH] And burn the hell out of things. You hear it over and over, and it's kind of treated as a joke, I guess. But, I suppose, those Rangers are more careful now-a-days.

INTERUPTION]

JN Chuck, before we took a break, I wanted to ask you what you thought of the environmentalism today as compared to back then?

CP Uh, people, in other words, environmentalists. DNR [Department of Natural Resources], EPA [Environmental Protection Agency]. or whatever, right? All standing for environmental.
JN Yeah, and environmental...
CP ... concerns, control, etcetera.
JN Wilderness advocates and that kind of thing.
CP Right. Ruling out anti-nukes, right?
JN Right.
CP [LAUGH]
JN OK. However you want to do it. [Laugh].

CP OK, all right. Glad to hear it. I wish there was more of them, but the recent controversies over this present presidential administration... in other words, the Reaganites... Reaganites, they're blaming him for not being able to control it... do the proper job. But perhaps they're asking for too much. He's only one man up there... not to be talking politics... he's only one man up there and he is controlled by his advisors. Frankly, I don't see how anybody could be president. I don't know how in the ... how in the world a man could talk intelligently about anything without conferring with an aide, you know? And I wish there was more environmentalists. At least they've been able to pin down all this stuff. They've pinned down the bad sites where the junk is running into the ground and threatening to poison the water five years from now... some city, or etcetera. Glad to see it. But how much money should be spent on it, is a good question. Where is it gonna come from? I don't believe in letting down on the defense budget or the budget they have worked out. Again, I told you, I'm voting for that guy... unless someone better comes along. And, boy, it looks to me that they can't find anybody better... nobody wants to run for the job. And environmentalists have done a hell of a job. The Sierra Club, you name it. Perhaps, the controversies over the choice of directors, as far as the Federal administration is concerned, there must be a reason for having these women appointed. He's not so dumb, or his administration isn't so dumb to appoint someone who don't know what they're doing. Again, it's politics.

JN You see the... you're not disillusioned with the Environmentalists or their point of view now?

CP Not a bit. Not a bit. As things get better... if Russia would just take a back seat, probably we could spend more money on it. We'd have Utopia. I was out in the forest yesterday... west of here. And you just don't appreciate it until you get off that blacktop super-highway and get in there. I took a picture standing beside that big Ponderosa Pine up Fish Creek. And I'm gonna compare it with a picture taken of me standing beside it, you know, thirty five years ago. I want to see what the comparison is. You just don't appreciate it. So I say: "More environmentalists, but go easy on the President. Go ahead and attack Congress." That's where the trouble is. If we could
eliminate Congress and appoint our own Congressman, then we'd get the job done.

JN Do you think environmentalism closely fit in with your job as a smokejumper?

CP Certainly. Certainly.

JN Could you describe how it did?

CP Well, of course, in my days the environmentalists... that particular word, perhaps, I never heard of it. We heard more such things as the Audubon Society and things like that. But certainly the environmentalists that are close to this situation... close to the problems, have a place in making recommendations, or being consulted as far as the cutting or the treatment of the timber in our National Forests. We've got pamphlets saying campground here two, three, four, five stretched across this state, and suddenly some conglomerate wants to come in and cut that mountain side and the environmentalists say: "Don't do it! We've got outlines for another campsite there that'll benefit everybody for this region here." And, you know, whether they're consulted, I don't know, but they should be. I think the Forest Service... their professionalism warrants contacting the environmentalists. Providing the environmentalists are together on the thing and they end up with an overall spokesman, or advisor. I mean, you can't deal with sixteen groups... screaming.

JN How do the... or how do you see smokejumpers as working into that picture?

CP Well, of course, smokejumpers are fire fighters. And I'm sure the smokejumpers have the blessing of the environmentalists, because, after all, the primary job of the smokejumpers is, unless they've delimited from their object, is putting out forest fires. And I say, I guess everybody wants to see them put out forest fires.

JN So you think the average smokejumpers really had a appreciation for nature?

CP I'd say so. Yeah, yeah.

JN Respect for... how about in their camp habits and stuff like that. Would they be pretty clean, or did they pitch garbage carelessly, or what?

CP Well, I chuckle over that kind of thing. You know, you hear... you read these signs... you're going into a wilderness area and you're pack in your sardine cans and you pack them out. I think I saw a sign yesterday, it said: "Pack in, pack out." I said: "What the hell is that all about?" Well, it means: "Don't leave sardine cans lying around. [LAUGH] Back to your question, now let me get to the meat of it... repeat it.
OK. The smokejumpers back then, do you think they appreciated the wilderness, first of all, and you said they did...

They did, yes.

And how did that show up in their habits in the woods?

Well, we never left... we never... let's say, we had a big crew fire. Let's say we had fifty jumpers in on a fire and maybe there was fifty ground fighters come in. They had their camp, we had our camp. We never left piles of junk around. We'd bury it, which, I guess, was OK, from the standpoint of the real hokey-pokey environmentalists. But now, of course, they got them carry out what you carry in. Well, smokejumpers can't do all that and I don't think they should be hindered with that. I mean, a couple of bean cans buried are not gonna hurt anything, providing you buy them deep enough that the bears won't dig them up and leave them lying around. But, of course, where the smokejumpers are, they ain't gonna find any campers or environmentalists or back backers, you know. So, I don't think there's any concern to be... nothing to be worried about.

Now, back to that other thing, you know, again, I told you, the grub was pretty poor on these fires, and, you know, we've often... we often did say: "Why in the hell don't they get some of these Army K-rations for the smokejumpers?" And, to my knowledge, they never did while I was there. We'd end up with the standard Forest Service provision on these fires, and that was a five gallon can of water and some canned beans and whatever. As near as I can remember, we never did have very good food. But of course, naturally, I laugh at that. Of course we survived. That was part of it. But whether or not they come in... I'm sure they must have come in with some compact packages of food now, similar to...

Freeze-dried stuff.

Right! Never heard of that before, you know, in the old days. I imagine they're fed pretty good now. Anybody that's a true smokejumper could get by real well on that... yeah, no problem, yeah.

Got a question for you too: since you were jumping in the years when the Mann Gulch Fire happened, what was... what did you hear about it; what was your connection with it?

Very sad thing, and I don't think it was... it wasn't... certainly wasn't anybody's fault. In those days, we didn't do that much jumping over on that East side. We had a few fires in Yellowstone... one thing and another, and we didn't have that much over on that Missouri River area, then let's say the Buffalo Grass areas. It was sparse timber up in there. I guess... speaking back as far as letting a fire burn, if they was... were gonna let a fire burn, let it burn over there, because it wasn't
that much timber. It was dotted with Yellow Pine, you know, or Ponderosa, and scrub... stuff like that, Scrub Pine. It was just unfortunate that we made that big of jump over there, and didn't realize what could happen. I'm sure we have learned. That was a touchy thing. And as you know, I should have gone on that fire. Did you know?

JN No, I didn't

CP You didn't realize, then, yeah. That was in forty... '49. Yeah, right, yeah. '49. We were out at the old Johnson Air Field and things were warming up, just like a day like this, and we had a rotation list of squad leaders. And we had a rotation list for crew fires, and three man squad leader-led fires, as I recall. And I was up for the next crew fire, which would have been a C-47 load... fifteen jumpers, a squad leader and a foreman. And, as you know, there was only certain foremen in those days. There was Art Cochran, Fred Brauer would jump on one although he was really needed more back at the depot. Ha! Speak of depot, I mean the Johnson Air Field. And so forth. And so I was next up as a squad leader on a crew fire... fifteen jumpers. Bill Hellman was either newly married, recently married, and either recently had a youngster... his wife. Or she was about to. Bill Hellman was a student over here at the U. Nice guy. I remember he wore a canvas flying hat... billed cap, canvas, like Mitchner use to wear on his aircraft carrier. And Bill Hellman was raw-bone type, well tanned, slender guy. Nice guy... nice kid, I should say... young fella. And he and I, were good friends and he was complaining about: "God, I wished I'd get this fire. I need that money for the hospital" or whatever. And one thing led to another, we talked and gabbed and man it was hot out at that Johnson Air Field. We knew there was gonna be fires, but where were they? We were looking at every cloud coming in from the west. And so, finally Bill and I... mutual understanding... I says: "OK, Bill, you take the next crew fire, I'll drop down one. I'll be up next. You take the next crew fire." I don't know if we made a little bet, or what... whatever. It worked out he was next and I reneged.

Geez, within fifteen minutes, here comes this call in from the Missouri River... a crew fire. Somebody had looked at it and said; "Man, we need this is a whopper, we need a C-47 crew." So, I says; "OK, Bill, here you go, man." And helped Bill suit up... helped his crew suit up and they boarded the Doug and away they went. "Adios fellas." They went to the East. So, I says: "Well, I don't know whether I'll get a crew fire." As I recall, this was on a Friday. That meant overtime and that lent more substance to Bill's anticipation of swapping with me, because he'd get a whole weekend of time and a half. Geez, within a half hour, I guess, here comes a call in from the St. Joe, but it wasn't a crew fire, it was a small fire. I think it was four or five... six acres, something like that, over on the St. Joe. So, I was next then, I suited up my crew... I don't remember what we jumped out of, I don't whether it was the Ford or the Travelaire or whatever... it was probably the Travelaire, you know, a three or four man crew. I guess there was four of us, me and three
jumpers. And we bailed out over on the St. Joe. Again, on this late Friday afternoon. So, we fought our fire... if I'm not mistaken, Anywaush was on that crew, I think. I can't remember... so many fires, you know, we jumped on. And we went over there, put the fire out... it took us about two and a half... three days. And, perhaps, it was Monday afternoon, for all I know or whatever, that we walked out and made arrangements of some District over there to get us up to the railroad tracks. In other words, we were carried up to the north to the tracks on the Milwaukee Road, as I remember. I think it was the Milwaukee Road that was on this side of the river out there, somewhere opposite St. Joe. And dispatch in Missoula made arrangements with that District: they stopped the damn train, and we got on the damn train and it carried us back over here to Missoula.

And, of course, we heard the news, the people on the train told us, "Oh, yes. You smokejumpers lost a lot of men over there." Jesus, we were shocked. The whole crew... Wag Dodge, of course, you know... of course he survived it, along with two jumpers: Ramsey and Skeezix, Skeezix, or something like that [Salle] survived it, everybody else was burned up. Uh, you know, that shook us. So, they had the funeral and so forth, but the odd thing about that fire I mean, it really shook me, because not only me and Bill Hellenman swapping on the fire, but most of that crew had been called in from the Nez Perce, as I remember. And a lot of those guys, I had just left Nine Mile camp with them. I had been left up in Nine Mile camp to pick up the stragglers that were coming in from the colleges late. And give them two jumps, give them some physical activity at camp. Most of them were repeaters, maybe all of them were repeat jumpers... it didn't take much training. But, anyway, we whacked them into condition as best we could and gave them two jumps up at Nine Mile at the new airstrip we built up there.

JN You had done this as a squad leader.

CP As a squad leader, yeah. And two good jumpers there: Joe Silvia and Stan Reba... Stan Reba was a young forestry student from Brooklyn, New York. And he'd gone and attended the University of Minnesota in forestry, along with this Joe Silvia, who was from my home town, Plymouth, Massachusetts, whom I'd never known before. And they'd became close buddies and started smokejumping. And they had worked on another District, too, in order to get previous experience to be accepted into the smokejumpers. And they were repeaters that year then. And I had jumped them all out; gave them their jumps and they had been trucked back into Missoula here and sent out on the Nez Perce District to do pre-jump work... project work, as we called it. And that... most of that crew had been brought, in as things had warmed up, and been brought into that airport on the day before these fires started to spring up. So, we come back from my fire and we learn the whole damn crew had been burned. Oh, my God! What a let down that was. And, of course, man, things were kind of being turned around there. Everybody was... "Who's fault was this?" and "It was nobody's fault." And I remember the had hearings in Missoula. Wag Dodge had to go down there and report
on everything the crew did when they landed and... it just happened. It wasn't Wag Dodge's fault. I'd worked with Wag many times on project work at Nine Mile. He was kind of a foreman that took care of culverts across the camp up Nine Mile... he was kind of a construction-type foreman. And I worked with Wag all the time... nice guy, quiet guy. He died about five years later, I guess, of cancer. So, anyway, there was a mumble-jumble here in Missoula. I think we still were getting a few fires, but not that much, but all eyes were on the Federal Building. There was hearings being held, and man, I'd... if it happened today, there'd be a Congressional investigation, I suppose. And Wag testified, as did the other two survivors. Ramsey, one of the survivors, I understand, was killed in an airplane crash here about two... three years ago over in Pennsylvania, I think that's where he came from. Jack Nash and I correspond year to year and he had told me. That just leaves one, and I don't know were his is. I'm anxious to see if he's... attends the reunion. Frightful experience... terrible catastrophe at... you know, at that time in '49, to have that happen. But, obviously the overhead, including the fire dispatchers, and whatever, down in the Federal Building learned that, that can happen, at least under that kind of condition over there on the Missouri. I don't know what arrangements they've made consequently from that, but the Mann Gulch Fire will always be remembered. We went over another year later, I guess, Jack Nash and I and one other jumper... somebody by the name of... not Grenager, but Greiner, I think his name was. I got pictures of him in there. And we went up on that hillside... we took the little boat, went across the Missouri, and we went up there and checked around for anything that was left over and straightened up the crosses that they had erected where each one of those jumpers fell.

JN You did that when?

CP Ah, that would have been in '50, yeah. I got pictures of it in there that I brought along that we took while we were up there, straightening up the crosses and checking over the area. We... Jack and I and the other guy, we went over on a weekend on our own time just to do it, yeah. Terrible thing, terrible thing.

JN Did that at all affect people afterwards as far as jumping?

CP You better believe it did.

JN How so?

CP They talked about it. Yeah... they talked about it. It made everybody recognize with a strong wind, no matter what kind of conditions, it can, you know, take off and burn you up. I mean, a lot of us were forestry students, we've been studying all these big fire in the United States and all those towns in Minnesota that were wiped out with 900 lives, and here we leave... lose thirteen jumpers to lousey Buffalo Grass in the Mann Gulch. So it made everybody," and I'm sure these young jumpers are told about the fire and what can happen. They must
be... that's all in the training, I suppose. The regular training when they sit everybody down, you know: "Now, this course here is on looking out for a fire, don't get caught in it" you know, I suppose, I don't know. Yeah.

JN Made people more cautious, do you think?

CP You better believe it. We were all... that taught us a lesson. It really did. I... even as a novice firefighter in that year, or preceding years fighting fires, I was always conscious of a good wind whipping up a fire that I was on, you know, and burn your butt. Especially in up-and-down terrain. So easy to get caught, you know, you can't make those legs move on up-and-down terrain. Particularly the Salmon River fires... dangerous situation down there. Dangerous. Up-and-down terrain. Standing on end and you got fifty jumpers around there stretching out in the rocks, trying to get a fire line around it, you know, on one of these hot days, these winds come up the canyons... if you're in any kind of timber or high grass, man, lookout.

JN What would you do to foresee that and not get stuck in a situation like that?

CP Size it up when you first get in there. Size up that fire. That was always... I always did that. I always walked around that damn fire. I started the crew working, at least on the lower end of it, or something. And I'd get around that fire to see what the hell you got. And if there's anything that's, let's say, inflammable with the wind behind it, keep your men down below it and work on up to it. Again, it's the same old thing: work like hell during the daytime hours until there's no chance of wind at, you know, suppertime. Then, burrow in and do some dirt throwing. Get it knocked down, yeah, yup. Six o'clock in the morning, it's a smoking mess. You can control it then and get inside the fire lines, you know. It's that turning up [LAUGH] it the turning up your garden. [LAUGH] Oh, God. I remember another situation, talking about that. You know, they had these little pumps and... oh, they worked all right, I guess, but I never found much use for them. There wasn't enough hose around that would reach the neighboring creek, you'd probably need five miles of hose to do any good. So that was a waste of time: dropping those in, and in most cases, unless, again, the fire boss or the squad leader or something saw a real opportunity to use one, you know, But otherwise, forget that stuff. [LAUGH] Little high speed pumps. The damn things wouldn't start [LAUGH] you'd be cranking. Not like a modern day Evenrude motor, you know... wear blisters on your hands... damn things.

JN You were a squad leader, then?

CP Yeah.

JN Must have made you real cautious about where to jump, too.

CP I was pretty careful about that, as all squad leaders were. Winds were changing, you'd look down and drop a streamer out and
the wind up here were blowing this way and you drop the streamer out and the damn thing would go the other way. You'd have two layers of air. And, again, I'd rather jump a guy just a little ways away to a safer spot, than try to poke him down on these snags... of, course that was part of our training, not to jump anybody in those damn tamarack snags. You'd land a parachute over the top and have the damn top break out, you know, and you'd come down with the snag. It happened. It's a wonder wasn't more killed. So we'd try to find a second growth stand, or something, you know... a featherbed landing, as we'd say. I made many a let-down though, as did many a jumper. Yeah, to let down.... That was always fun. I think I mentioned it in the questionnaire about that thing. There was one guy from down here... south of here, I don't know whether Hamilton, or what, but he worked... he climbed poles for a living for the power company. Man, he could put on a set of spurs and take a rope around the biggest tree, man, he'd got up there like a monkey. It was always a pleasure to have him around. And I remember, on one fire, being a squad leader, my chute hung up on a hell of a tree. Everybody else was on the ground, the chutes were on the ground; mine was up there, and you got to get your own chute. You couldn't ask one of your jumpers to do it. And that was a big tree. No harness, you had to use a rope to go up that thing. And man, I tried it. I went up ten feet, twelve feet, and man, I come right back down. There was no way I was gonna get up that thing and get that chute. So I was trying to... I spent the better part of a half a day trying to figure out how I was gonna ask him to do it for me, without lowering my position as a squad leader. Finally, realizing the type of guy he was: a native son around here, who was a pole climber, I got to him and... I don't know how I did it. I didn't bribe him, I know that. Somehow or other, maybe I says: "Hey, listen, I can't get up there. You get it, will you?" It was a disgrace to leave a parachute up in a tree. I think they look at it differently now-a-days; they'd rather have the damn chute left up there, than risk anybody's physical being climbing up one of them damn killers. Christ, he whipped a rope around that thing, put the spurs on, he went up there like a monkey, and got my chute down. That's the only time I had to get someone else to get my chute... he got it for me, yeah. Put it back in the bag and come back to Missoula. [LAUGH]

JN I wanted to ask you, too: now, looking back on it, was the most important aspect of being a smokejumper to you... as far as your life, goes... was it making... being able to make those extra bucks, or was it...?

CP Oh, no, certainly not the bucks. The experience; the hard work, good training, good food. Instilling in somebody, whether he was a menial jumper or whatever, the benefits of working for such a project. Just plain good.

JN So, even after the military, after working... you worked pretty hard in the military too, you saw that it benefited you personally.
CP  Right. I fought in the Pacific and coming out of there, I fitted in here good. And, I'll tell you something else: in later life, though, it's been a true experience. I still own a chain saw, I do some wood carving and can I attribute my hobby, for instance, from being out here. I am the forester in my neighborhood. Down in Florida, of all places. And they say: "forest," why I should say: "jungle." Well, we have forty homes in this oasis out on an island... we call it the "island," it's really a peninsula... it's Long A One A, which, I'm sure, you're familiar with and it's just down below Cape Canaveral... Vero Beach. And we live in this secluded area, no lawns are allowed and all houses had to be back in the jungle in a clearing... each individual house. And... most of them are up on pins, because I built several of them. And we don't... we try... we have a homeowner association, we try not to cut down any trees. They're all Sable Palms and Live Oaks, and as this stuff grows, it becomes a problem... beside some house, or whatever, they'll call me and I'll say: "Hey, we'll cut that one down. Nothing lost, it's a [INAUDIBLE]. So, here again, I'm using that experience from out here with the Forest Service and my forestry training. And, now, previous to that, though, since I retired, I was a cop. When I left jumping, I became a cop in Fort Lauderdale, Florida, when it was a small town. We had something like twenty six policemen and when I joined I was number twenty six badge. Now, we talk 400 cops, you know. But, all of that training out here, it had a place in your life, either in dealing with men, I mean, either putting out a fire or catching some thief, or something, and either running them down on foot... not necessarily spraying him with bullets. [LAUGH] But, stuff like that. It all has the training... hard work.

JN  Discipline, I suppose.

CP  Discipline! A disciplined person, yeah, that's about it. In later years I became a detective sergeant, and, of course, then it was typical TV-type situation. I was chasing jewel thieves and, you know....

[END OF TAPE]