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Kenneth Roth interviewed by Dan Hall on June 12, 1984, for the Smokejumper Oral History Project. #133-92.

DH This is an oral history interview with Kenneth Roth in his home in Missoula, Montana, on June 12, the Smokejumpers Oral History Project.

DH Can you start out Mr. Roth by... with some basic biographical information, where you were born and when.

KR Well I was born in Hoxie, Kansas in 1924.

DH How did you become involved with smokejumping?

KR Well actually through a friend of mine after I was in the Navy in World War II. And after I got out of that we... I was working... I was living down in southern Idaho, that's where my folks had moved to. And, ah, he'd, ah... well my friend had been going to school in the University of... or the Washington State University there in Pullman. And he'd heard about smokejumping up there... this was in 1946 and I'd just got out of the Navy there in early '46. He just come over and talk to me one day about smokejumping, you know. We didn't even know what it amounted to, what it boiled down to, you know. So we decided to go; we'd had some information on it. We went up to McCall, Idaho there, talked to them.

DH Where did you do your training at?

KR Well, the first year we trained up here at the old Nine Mile Station out there at Missoula, but after that they trained everybody at McCall then that was jumping down there. But that first year they trained up here.

DH When was your first fire jump?

KR Well, in '46, but I couldn't tell you the date or anything, but, ah, probably would have been... I can't even remember when we finished training that year, but I'd say probably some time in June in '46... June or July at the latest.

DH Do you remember how many guys went through training with you?

KR Yeah, there... not exactly... there must have been 50 of them out there at the time. There was a lot more that already gone through training, you know, before we did, especially here in Missoula. And a few of them had gone through... that was jumping in McCall... had gone through up here before we did.

DH Had you done any flying or jumping while you were in the Navy?

KR No, I was on a destroyer in the Navy. I learned to fly on the G.I. Bill after I got out of the Navy, really started in '46.
DH So you were flying and jumping at the same time?

KR Yeah, learning to fly I should say, yeah.

DH And did you fly planes for the Forest Service?

KR Well, I always flew for a contractor, but I... I started flying in jumpers in 1952, that's when I went to work for Johnson Flying Service. I started down at McCall, worked down there one year, and then they moved me up here to Missoula. I've been here ever since until they sold out in 1975.

DH What kind of planes were you flying when you started dropping out jumpers?

KR Well, the first airplane I dropped jumpers out of was an old Travelaire 6000 they called it, it was an old high wing monoplane. And then I started in the Ford Tri-motor. That's the only jump planes we had down at McCall at that time.

DH How many men would be in an airplane for a jump?

KR Well two in the Travelaire, two jumpers and a spotter and eight jumpers and a spotter in the Ford.

DH Did you ever make any rescue flights?

KR Well, yeah, I also flew helicopters, you know, for quite a few years and I made quite a few rescue flights with a helicopter. And I wouldn't say they were rescue flights in the airplane, but I had some emergency flights. The first one I can remember was down at McCall was picking up a hunter that had been shot in the back country and stuff like that.

DH Any emergency flights for jumpers?

KR Yeah, I remember one night, I dropped some jumpers on a fire were... just on the other side of, ah, the big reservoir there, Canyon Ferry Reservoir. And one of them got hurt and so I came back and got some equipment and went back over there. Took them over to rescue him, you know, or get him out I should say. And well last summer... was it last summer... don't remember now if it was last summer or summer before last... one of the girl jumpers got hurt up here and I dropped jumpers in there to get her out, you know. Cut a helispot and stuff but and stuff like that but....

DH What was the use of helicopters... how would they use those?

KR How did they use them you say?

DH Yeah.

KR Well, for fire work and stuff, you know, they'd haul crews maybe from a base camp up to top end of a fire or something like
that, or they use them now to drop water on them... on fires, and for rescue work and stuff like that. But they use helicopters for a lot of stuff now.

DH Did you ever do any water bombing yourself?

KR Oh, yeah. I've been doing that for the last... well I've done that... I flew the first tanker that was flown in Region I which was a Ford Tri-motor. And then I've done it for years after that, and then here the last four years I've been doing it every spring down in Arkansas and North Carolina and Tennessee and that country.

DH Can you explain the procedure for a water bombing?

KR Well there isn't much procedure really, it's kind of like, ah, dropping anything... like dropping cargo except you're dropping water, you know, or slurry, whatever. And you get down fairly low, you know, usually about the tree tops and... whenever you can, there's always times when you can't get that low and what have you. Then it's just a matter of getting used to where that stuff's going to hit when you let go, you know, you got to leave it a little bit... and that kind of deal. But it's pretty hard to explain really as far as....

DH How was the water kept in the plane, was it in tanks or in...?

KR Yeah, they're in tanks, and, ah, most planes... well, it depends... there's some of the bigger tankers they have as high as eight doors, you know, where they can drop... well they have compartments in the tank where they can drop up to say eight tanks, one at a time if they want to or all of them at once or four of them at one time or whatever, you know. I was flying the B26 the last four years and we had four tanks in most of them and we could drop any combination you wanted really, just with a selector switch and push a button.

DH How long would it take to respond to a fire?

KR Well, to get going it didn't take us very long, ah, like on a tanker we, ah... we're setting right there, ready to go, and by the time they can get it loaded which there again depends on... I'd say with the B26 it was about 10 minutes from the time they got a call to where we'd be taxiing out anyway. And then it makes a lot of difference like Ft. Smith now you can get hung up with traffic down there every once in awhile and be delayed on the end of the runway or something, but....

DH What would you do after you'd drop either jumpers or water bombs off?

KR Well, if you're dropping slurry, you know, you... when you get through dropping they usually have radio contact with somebody on the ground, you know, or if you're working with the
lead plane... most of the time like down South we'd just work by ourselves and usually talk to somebody on the ground unless you get a bigger fire then they'd have a lead plane and you usually go through them, you know, and they're talking to somebody on the ground. But they might want you to look the fire over and suggest hot spots or whether they thought it needed any more, you know, depending on how big it was and how many people they had on it. You know there's some times that they wouldn't have a chance to even look the fire over yet, you know. But other than that it's just a matter of going back and they decide if you want another load... usually it isn't the tanker pilots decision whether they get the second load or not, somebody either on the ground makes that decision or say, if you've got a lead plane that he might do it... probably does, yeah.

DH How many planes would respond to a fire?

KR Anywhere from one to... well, like in down there we only had two on the base so unless you really had something going then they'd bring in something in from outside, but you can have in the pasture it'd be as high as maybe eight, ten airplanes working on a fire. And I still think you'll see that down in California a lot. But either... it hasn't been that busy around here in the last ten years really to be honest with you, been pretty slow.

DH Can you remember the largest fire you flew?

KR Oh, I've been on fires in California up to a 100,000 acres.

DH How many men?

KR I wouldn't... I'd say probably 5000, maybe. That's just a guess.

DH Were all the pilots based together?

KR Oh, no. No, they'll be scattered around, ah, different bases, ah, well just like in this country, you know, they'll have, ah, tankers here and, ah, they used to keep them in Grangeville, they haven't the last couple of years, but I understand they might have one there this year, Coeur d' Alene, they'll have one or two over there. They used to have them like in Helena and down at Salmon, in McCall. I don't think they have them at Salmon anymore, they don't have them in Helena, they change, you know, off and on. They still have them in McCall, and they used to have them over in La Grande, Oregon, they got them in Redmond, Oregon, now, and, you know, it changes from one year to the next. But they'll be scattered around, you hardly ever see... in California now at Redding there'll probably be at least five or six four-engine tankers based right there at Redding, and there'll be others like at Chico and, I can't think of some of the others... down in, ah, Ontario there, used to be in Santa Barbara, I don't think they have a base there anymore, they... I think they moved that out of there.
DH Did you have to do any project work while you were a pilot?

KR Oh, no, we were working for a contractor, you know, and even the pilots now that work for the Forest Service they don't do project work in the summer time. They might be on another kind of work in the winter time, you know. But we were... when I was flying for a contractor like with Johnson year around well we used to work in the shop in the winter time if we wasn't doing anything else. But it was just kind of a freeby I guess you might say.

DH What would you do while you were waiting for a call?

KR Just stand around and talk I guess. You know, we'd go out... we used to play Frisbee and stuff out there, and we could throw a football around or something like that, you know. Used to be in the old days the jumpers used to play volleyball a lot, you know. I remember being down in Silver City and they always had a volleyball court set up and they'd play a couple of times a day. We used to play with them, you know, that way... just that kind of stuff.

DH Like to go back to your experiences jumping, when was the last jump you made?

KR It was in 1950. I can't even tell you where that was at, you know, it was out of McCall, but I can't even remember, ah.... I had about 27 fire jumps I think total in five years of jumping, but there's only two or three that I can remember where I jumped exactly, you know. There'd be something about it... either a kind of a rough jump spot or something... and other than that I don't, ah, I just don't remember them, you know, that well.

DH You think your experiences as a jumper influenced your flying in any way?

KR No, I don't think so. I kind of got into both flying and jumping, you know, just like I was telling you getting into jumping I got into flying about the same way. I... I'd... when I quit jumping I was working. I'd been working in the off season for a logging company down there at McCall. When I quit jumping I went to work for them full time and of course I knew one of the pilots... well, I knew the pilots that was flying there for Johnson. One of them had taken a leave of absence and I just met him on the street one day and he wanted to know if I'd be interested in flying for the company, and that's how I got into that, really. I even took a cut in pay to do it. But I was young and single and not too smart at that time, so that's how I ended up flying really for a living. I never set out to train as a pilot, to ever make my living at it when I started flying. I... there again I took that on the G.I. Bill because it didn't cost me anything and I wasn't doing anything in the winter time. And I'd go down and I got all my ratings and everything on the G.I. Bill, never cost me anything.
DH  How long did it take?

KR  Well I'm only... took me a couple of winters. I got through a private license and small engine rating and well, commercial license actually before it was all over. But, ah, and then flight instructor's rating, and, ah, I guess maybe a total of three winters to get all of them.

DH  Did you or any other pilots have any accidents while you were with the Forest Service?

KR  Well I had one. I had a Ford Tri-motor quit me with a load of jumpers, you know, in the take-off there in Spotted Bear, we ended up in the timber, but we all got out of it all right. But that's the only one I had. There was others. We lost an airplane down in Idaho; he'd dropped a couple of jumpers, he was dropping their cargo and he and a cargo dropper got killed in it. And, ah, well, we had that Ford crash in there at Moose Creek. He wasn't really dropping jumpers then, but he had jumpers on and he was going to let some cargo off there at Moose Creek and then drop the guys on a fire. And they crashed there... over shot the runway and hit the trees on the end and it exploded and burned up. The pilot... the pilot and the spotter got out of it without... I don't think the spotter hardly got any injuries at all, the pilot got burnt pretty good... well, you know, bad enough, nothing serious, he continued to fly, you know, he was off for awhile but.... One other guy, the supervisor over there, he lived through it, but he died later, the other jumpers they was killed right almost there from the fire not from the crash immediate.

DH  What kind of air speed and altitude were you flying at for a jump?

KR  Well, we used to, ah... well, they used to b about 1000 feet. I think most of the time now we're shooting for 12 to 1500, kind of depends on the wind, they usually go for 1500 if there's no wind at all, but I think 12 is about minimum they go for anymore for altitude and... and like with the Otter we... we usually kick them out about 80 knots, you know, on the speed which is what kind of want. Ah, back in the old days with the Ford or the Dug we used to slow down to about 70 at that time, but since they've changed the chutes, you know, with D bags and what have you they... they like a little more speed anyway, so that's about what we shoot for around 80.

DH  You see any major changes in attitudes of pilots over the years?

KR  No, I don't think so really, no I... you know I... course the pilots, most of them that I've been familiar with, you know, or worked with was in the business for quite a long time too, and the newer ones I really don't have that much to do with them to be honest with you. But I think they, you know... I sometimes wonder if, ah... I think their attitude has changed in a lot of
ways. Even the Forest Service where we used... you know, we used to use single engine airplanes say for dropping jumpers all the time, you know, like that Travelaire and the old Noorduyne... I never did fly the Noorduyne but they used to use them. And, ah, you know, we'd drop cargo and stuff just like we did with anything, but now they want you to be higher, you know, no lower than 500 feet above the jump spot or any of the terrain really which makes for difficult dropping, you know. I don't really agree with that program, I don't think it's a safety factor from that stand point, you know, because what they're talking about is if your engine quits you will... you're just going to glide another quarter of a mile if you're 500 feet than if you're only 200 feet. So it's not a big safety factor to me.

DH While you were jumping what kind of project work did you have to do?

KR Oh, we done a lot of things. I remember building, ah... we used to do some trail work, and, ah, done a lot of building telephone lines, you know, that get tore down during the winter time, and build a lot of fence out in the range country, you know. We cut a lot of posts and poles for... and they'd treat them and what have you, that they'd send out to different ranger stations and stuff like that they didn't... peeled them all with an ax you know and that kind of stuff. And I remember doing a lot of road work, putting in culverts, and then we done a lot of... in the winter time, ah, after first couple of years... well at least the first year I... you know I was only on through the summer with jumping and then I was on a road crew for the Forest Service that had nothing to do with jumping, running a jack hammer one winter. But, ah, then we got to work in... we'd do a lot of work in the loft, you know, repairing chutes and stuff like that in the winter time.

DH Were you a licensed rigger?

KR Nope, never did get a license; I done a lot of rigging, but I never did get licensed.

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

KR It didn't bother me any. I spent one... in 1948 they had a lot of high water and a lot of flood damage down there around Riggins and that country, you know, and, ah, oh, I was down there with a crew... I was the squad leader from... from '47 on, and, ah... I had a crew down there, eight of us, we were down there on that flood control pretty near all summer. That was a slow fire season. I never got a jump that year until in September I remember, and then I got three of them right there in a row. Of course, most all the guys had left for one thing, you know, but, ah, I didn't mind that, ah, fact is we were getting a day of overtime every day that... every week, you know, which the guys that was staying in McCall they didn't get any time, you know, because they didn't have any fires, so we thought that was all right really. We done a lot of work and had a lot of fun doing
it really.

DH Do you and your buddies ever get around and sit down and swap stories after the jumping season was over?

KR Oh, yeah, I think any time you get... it's just like with pilots now, you get a bunch of them together, you know, and they're always telling tales and we do the same thing with jumpers, you know... things that happened. It kind of... you kind of have to sit down with a bunch of guys and get to talking and a lot of stuff will come back to you, you know. But, ah... yeah, I suppose that there's a lot of that, ah, really I... well, like say I've... I've dropped a lot of jumpers and worked with them for many years flying, but you kind of get out of touch with them as far as, ah, being around them all the time, you know. Once in awhile when we'd be standing by out here some place, you know, you get to talking to some of them. But the thing of it is I've been away from the jumping end of it... the guys... there's nobody jumping now when I was, you know, and... and you just kind of... you don't really get involved with them... it's a little different I guess.

DH How did your family react when you told them you were going to smokejump?

KR Well they didn't say anything, my mother was the same way... it was just... my dad had died the year I got out of high school and... and, ah, she just... a little more, ah... she didn't know what I was doing. She didn't say as much about that when I was going to learn to fly really. But she didn't know what it amounted to, really, I think. Then when I told her that, you know, we was parachuting at fires and stuff that didn't seem to bother her. I don't... I really don't think she ever really did know what I was doing because she... although I've flown her a few times in an airplane. She enjoyed riding in one, it didn't bother her at all.

DH [Were] most of the jumpers veterans when you first started jumping?

KR They were then. I think we only had, ah, two guys... there was I think 36 there in McCall the first year I was there and there was only two of them, the guy that was the foreman hadn't been in the military, he'd broke both legs or something in a bad ski accident, and, ah, he couldn't... fact is they told him at one time that he would never walk again, but he was jumping when I was up there, you know, but he wasn't... he'd never been in the military and then one other kid that lived there at McCall jumped that year, and that's the only ones I know that I can remember in '46 that weren't. And most of those I'd say, ah, out of that... there'd have been 34... out of I'd say at least, ah, 25 of them had been paratroopers in the military.

DH Had any of them had fire fighting experience before they started out smokejumping?
KR Ah, I had, I worked for the Forest Service in the summer I
got out of high school, and I was on four different pretty good
sized project fires there. I was down on the Payette Forest,
Garden Valley. And I don't know... well the kid that lived there
in McCall he had... he'd worked for a logging company and stuff
and he'd been there all of his life, you know, and he'd been on
fires I know. Some of the others I really couldn't say, lot of
them hadn't I know that. And some of them could have, but I
would say not too many of them.

DH What kind of gear would you carry when you jumped?

KR Well we carried, of course, our tools, you know, our Pulaski
and shovel and then somewhere along the line with the...
depending on if you'd had an eight man crew you'd pretty near
always drop a cross-cut saw, you know, we didn't have any power
saws at that time, and, ah, of course your groceries and water,
and sleeping bag, that was about the main thing you carried
really.

DH Did you ever get stuck in a tree?

KR Oh, yeah. Yeah, I remember one time, ah, I and one other
guy we were the old timers I think that was our second year and
everybody else... we had eight of us in the Ford, and, and the
other six were all new men that year, you know. So this other
old jumper... like I say old jumper we'd both... that was our
second year but we were old timers. He said "Well, let's bet a
beer on" you know anybody that hangs up has to buy everybody else
a beer. So everybody went for it; we were the only two that hung
up, which happens every once in awhile. But I didn't hang up
often. As I remember a couple of times maybe out of all of them.

DH What would you do if you got hung up in a tree?

KR Well, we carried a rope with us to, ah, get down, you know,
and we had a let down procedure for getting out of trees. I
never hung very high, fact is I think only one time I ever used
the rope, I'd usually be in a tree that had limbs all the way to
the bottom or something. We used to jump right into timber and
heavy jack pine we called it, lodgepole or whatever sometimes and
there's really no way you can get the... get through it, you
know. And, ah, but most of the time then you'd almost be
touching the ground.

DH How long did it take you to pack out?

KR Well, it... there again it depended... ah, a lot of country
we jumped in I can remember about the farthest I had to hike was
about 30 miles I guess to an airport down there in that
Chamberlain Basin country. And, ah, oh, at that time I guess
we'd... we'd probably run that 30 miles, we'd have... if we had
to go that far they'd send a pack string and pack our gear, you
know. I remember going out of that one fire, there was eight of
us there also and they want us to cut trail for... on the way
out, you know, and we started out with the pack string, ahead of
them, and two guys on a cross-cut saw and the other six with
Pulaskis. And the first guy in the lead would stop if he came to
a tree across the trail, if it was a smaller one he'd stop with a
Pulaski and then everybody else went by while he'd chop it out
and then run to catch up. That's how we went for 30 miles and
we'd beat the pack string in there by, oh, an hour, an hour and
a half, and cut a lot of trees out of the way on the way.

DH  What's a Pulaski?

KR  Well it's a ax on one end and kind of a hoe on the other
end, you know, used for building fence or... or like cutting
logs.

DH  Did every man on the crew had one of those?

KR  Yeah, did at that time... I don't know now I think when they
drop bigger crews that they split the tools up a little bit.
They... I don't think they drop one for every man on the deal.
But at that time we had everything geared up for a two man fire
and sometimes you'd need two shovels or two Pulaskis, you know,
so everybody carried one of each. And I think they still do
maybe with the two man, but they make their packs up different,
see, make them up for a two man fire or eight man or 32 man or
whatever, see. Where ours was all made up for two man fires, you
just threwed that many packs on, or everybody had his own pack,
but they usually dropped two packs at a time on a parachute when
they was dropping cargo.

DH  While you were jumping what would you do with your free
time?

KR  Well, we done a lot of partying... you mean when you were
off duty. Yeah, you know, we was just like all young guys, you
know, we'd be downtown drinking beer or chasing girls or
something, you know. Don't tell the wife I said that [laughs].

DH  Anybody ever get into trouble doing that?

KR  No not too much. The first year we was there I don't think
we had any trouble and we really had a good a rapport I guess you
might say with the people in town and everything. Then they
started getting a few renigades in there, you know, a few of them
would cause a little trouble downtown and stuff. But as a whole
I don't there was very much of a problem at all. But there was a
couple of guys got throwed in jail maybe for getting too drunk or
something but that's about all really, no big deals that I know
of.

DH  Is there anything that really sticks out in your mind about
your training to smokejump?

KR  No, not really. When we were training out here of course
they... I think we spent about a month... at least a month up
here with... we'd spend a half a day actually kind of training for a smokejumper and then a half a day sawing wood, you know, that's how they got all their wood. Most all the Forest Service, ah, office buildings and stuff was fired by wood, you know, like the ranger stations and what have you, and we cut all that wood with our cross-cut saw, you know, and split it with an ax or a maul and a wedge. That was, you know, to help get you in shape too. But I don't remember anything real exciting about it.

DH Was fire fighting a physically demanding job?

KR Oh, yeah. I think fire fighting if you're work at fire fighting it's probably about as hard a job as you can get, you know, and it's... breathing that smoke and getting in your eyes and working and sweating and maybe going... the longest I ever put on a fire was probably about twelve days, you know. And, it's pretty demanding, you know, and working in steep country and stuff like that that's a lot of work.

DH Did a lot of guys wash out because they couldn't handle the physical labor?

KR Oh, there was some that, ah... I think right now then they're a little tougher on them in training as far as, ah... well they go about it a different way.... I think when I was learning to jump they looked at you from the idea of how you could handle an ax and a shovel and maybe a saw and stuff like that. Now with... in our training to, you know, to get in shape and stuff we used to run and stuff like that, but like now they make them... they have to run a certain distance, you know, in so much time... I don't know just what it is now, but I know it's pretty tough to do. You have to be in pretty good shape to do it I should say. But we never did have anything that way on a time deal, we'd usually have a... well, I done a lot of the training down at McCall, you know, I was in charge of training there for about the last four years I jumped really, and I could usually keep up with most anybody that was there, you know, I was... usually would take the lead on something like that and then the rest of them would... more or less try to keep up, which, you know, I'd say most of them could. You'd have some that would be dragging a little bit, but basically I hadn't... I don't know of anybody that, ah, I can't really think of anybody off hand that I'd say never held his end up, you know, when we was fighting a fire or something.

DH What do you think about when you step out of that plane?

KR Well I don't know... I... you know, to me... of course I used to do a little climbing and stuff with, ah... you know, like poles and trees and that kind of work. But, you know, you get up the top of a say a forty foot pole and you look like you're 10,000 feet in the air. But looking out of an airplane it's all together different, you know, you don't... you don't have that feeling of height I don't think. I think I'd rather jump out of an airplane than stand on top of a platform up on top of a pole,
you know, if you didn't have much room or anything to hold you there, you know.

DH Did you or anybody else you knew of ever carry a good luck piece while you were jumping?

KR No, I never did and I can't really say that I remember anybody that did. Probably was somebody that might have had rabbits foot or something, I don't know, but I never did.

DH How long would it take you from the minute you got out of the plane to when you landed?

KR Well, at the time I was jumping our chutes was designed to fall a thousand foot a minute, and we used to jump at that time usually our altitude was 1000 foot, that's what we shot for, you know. And so you're looking at a minute from the time you bail out until you was on the ground.

DH What was the first thing you'd do when you hit the ground?

KR The first thing you do, of course, is get out of your jumpsuit and your chute and stuff and we'd always... unless your chute was hanging in a tree or something, you would always do it up, check on the rest of the guys if you had more than two of you if you was... pretty near everybody together, but you'd always check with everybody to see they was all right every time they got to the ground and that kind of stuff. You'd do up your parachute and you'd usually, ah... everybody'd get together then in one spot without your, ah... we always put out our double L's for... which meant everybody was all right or.... And then we'd decide what we was going to take to the fire, how far it was, and a lot of times we might just decide to camp about where we landed, you know, if the fire wasn't too far or if it was closer to water or whatever, you know. Or even then we'd go grab our tools and go hit the fire and then maybe go back for it depending on just what the fire was doing and a lot of different things that way.

DH How'd you keep an eye on the fire when you were down on the ground?

KR Well, you mean when you were to the fire or before you got to it?

DH Before you got to it.

KR Well, you couldn't always do it. You know, you'd get on the ground... I remember the first fire I jumped on, ah, just two of us jumped on it, and we jumped across... it was in pretty heavy timber and we jumped across the creek from it, you know, and then after you got on the ground we couldn't see it and... we could see it from there, I'll take that back... we could see it from our jump spot, just the smoke coming up, small smoke. Well, when we headed over there then we couldn't find it, and we looked
around and looked around, so finally I went back over to where I could see it over there then I'd try to holler across, but I'd lose track of the other guy, you know. We finally found it that way, but, ah, it was just one of those things, you know, all it was was an old decayed log that... it was just... you could pick up a handful of it and squeeze water out of it, but it was just setting there smoldering, and it would have never gone anyplace unless... it might have stayed there for two or three weeks and done that and then a good wind come up or something and got it into grass and stuff and then taken off, but it wasn't going to go anywhere for three or four days anyway.

DH Did you have any trouble with wildlife while you were jumping?

KR Hardly ever see any. We come off a fire one night after dark using flashlights and a couple of us was, ah... maybe half a mile ahead of the other guys and they could see cougar tracks in our tracks on the way out... whether he was following us, but, ah, we never seen or heard of them, or they never did see him either but they seen the tracks and they were in our tracks so they knew they were in between us there.

DH Do you feel that there is any kind of a special disposition that it takes to be a smokejumper?

KR No, not necessarily, I just think a guy that doesn't mind working, you know, and in good shape, he'd have to be in good shape, but, ah, and get along with people, you know, ah, but I think that's about every average person, you know, really.

DH How do you feel about women smokejumping?

KR Well I... you know, I really don't know. I still don't think that women are physically able to really do the work that is demanded of smokejumpers at times, you know. But I don't know, some of them are pretty rugged all right, but, ah, that... of course I've never been on a fire with one. They didn't have any women fire fighters when I was fighting fire and of course not jumping either, but, ah, I've seen some. I've hauled a lot of fire crews, you know, that weren't jumpers, you know, where they had IR crews and stuff with women on them, and a lot of them I just... you know by looking at them you can just figure that there's no way that they can get out there and really do a man's work for ten or twelve hours, you know. I just don't think it's possible. But, you know, there's a lot of other jobs that, ah, needs to be done on a fire, just mopping up, a lot of those used to do that, mop up work and stuff, you know, which is not nearly as demanding as building a fire line.

DH What's the mop up work?

KR You know, after the fire's contained, you know, and then they start working in from the edges and putting out all the smokes and stuff. It's kind of, do at your leisure really you
DH Did you keep a diary of your jumps?

KR Well, we used to keep a diary, a so-called Forest Service diary, you know, you wrote down everything you did and when you did it and all that, but I don't have any... I have no record of my jumps at all. They... fact is years ago they give out... started giving out pins and stuff for anybody with 50 jumps, you know, and then on up 100 jumps and what have you, and I wasn't even... I didn't even know whether I had enough jumps for that at the time, and they sent me a pin and told me I had 56 is what I had total, some of those were training jumps.

DH How do you recall your days of jumping?

KR Well, they were enjoyable. I enjoyed the job and the good bunch of people we worked with, you know. I... I can't remember anybody that I worked with or jumped with that I didn't like, you know. We used to play... there was another thing... we had a baseball team down there at McCall and we used to win the... we'd play all the other towns around there that had town teams, you know, like old sand lot ball you might say. And of course we had kids on there that... I'd played a little ball in high school and what have you... and we had kids on there that were playing ball in college that were good, you know. Well we'd, of course, win that championship every year. We had a lot of fun anyway.

DH Well I think I've about exhausted my list of questions, have you got anything that you'd like to add that we might have missed or...?

KR I can't think of anything. I, ah, like I said that... it's just another job and probably if you got 15 or 20 guys around that you used to jump with we'd start thinking of, you know, some different stories and stuff and things that happened, funny things that happened. Ah, we had one guy when they first... that... first year that risers, you know, that... where your chute hooks onto your shoulder harness... on your harness I should say... well when we first started jumping they just had a regular old snap, you know, they'd snap it in there with no safety or anything. You'd think there's no way that could come unhooked but we had a guy have one come unhooked one day, and he jumped, and, of course, he came down on his emergency chute. And then they got to experimenting they found out you flop that thing around enough and get it in the right shape and pull on it and it would come open. So then they started going to a safety pin they'd run through them. Of course now they've done completely away from them, they've got a different type lock all together. But a few things like that. One guy come down on top of another's chute when they were still in the air, he was falling a little faster, slid down over the chute and then got tangled up in the lines and they both ended up coming down on one chute. And both of them got... well one of them broke his foot, in fact that was his last jump, he never did, ah... he still worked for
the Forest Service after that, fact is I think he's still with them. But the other guy didn't get hurt at all.

DH I'd like to turn this tape over just to finish up here if you don't mind.

[END OF SIDE A]

[BEGIN SIDE B]

DH How about any memories from your flying days dropping out jumpers.

KR Well, I never really had any... I can't remember anything being exceptionally exciting or anything about dropping jumpers, you know. There's been a time or two when the air would be so turbulent that, you know... usually it'd be too windy or something for the jumpers, you know, to go, but there's been a time or two when it was so rough that... in the place we was trying to work that I just had to call it off myself, you know, because it just wasn't a safe operation. But I'd say that only happened about two or three times in 25 years.

DH Has there been a lot of change in the technology that they use for jumping, the equipment and...?

KR Well, they've changed their chutes and I think... of course the jumpers has got a lot better chutes than they had then. They're bigger for one thing, and they come down slower, and they've got more control over them and stuff like, which I think they're a lot better, you know. The airplane, of course the Otter is a good airplane for jumpers. It's got a lot of good points for dropping jumpers, you know, and it's good... it's easy for the pilot... a lot easier on the pilot getting around with that say compared to a DC3. But I flew a DC3 a lot and it's got a lot of advantages too. I still like the old airplane. But you have to be a little more, you know... you have to fly it more than you do an Otter, you know.

DH How about the equipment for the jumpers, has that changed?

KR No, it's pretty much standard other than, ah... you know, they got... like their food and stuff, they got freeze dried and all that kind of stuff which is a lot lighter and... and the tools are basically the same thing that we always used, you know, except now they go to any bigger fire instead of getting the cross-cut saw they'll get power saws, you know, and that kind of stuff. Ah, and of course when I was jumping they didn't have any tankers either, see, and they have those to help them out now which I think does them a lot of good at times. Tankers in conjunction with jumpers is a good combination really if they're used right.

DH Do you have any regrets about jumping?
KR Oh no. Never got hurt or anything. No, I... like I say I think it's a... I really think it's a good job for a young guy that needs a summer job. That's the worst part about it, it's strictly a summer job, and I don't think it's... you know, some of the guys that... oh, like out there... you probably know them, Larry Nelson and Fite and a lot of those guys that's got a lot of years in... got a lot of years jumping, but there's not that many jobs for everybody, you know. There... like here was one of the biggest bases, down at McCall there was only... well, there might be about five guys that had a job there all year around, you know, out of their whole crew. So it's not a good job for a guy to get into for longevity I don't think, basically.

DH Well, is there anything else that you'd like to add?

KR I can't think of anything else now, you know. Probably think of things after you leave.

DH Yeah. Well I'd like to say thanks for the interview.

KR Well you're welcome.

DH Certainly appreciate it.

[END OF TAPE]