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John Harper interviewing Paul Sulinski, Fairbanks, Alaska, July 6, 1984. Paul, you're probably the oldest active smokejumper in the business today of all bases. Could you, first, tell me what got you interested in smokejumping and what the training procedures and the philosophy of the jumpers were in 1962?

PS Well, actually, I started in '59 at Winthrop and I'd heard about fire fighting... I grew up back east and after I came out of the military... I was in the military pretty young, came out about 19 or 20, I headed back west and I wound up working trail crew in the Washington Cascades and I had a lookout and I heard about these guys jumping out of airplanes and I had to do it. So, I got myself in it immediately... as fast as I could, I got applied and got accepted in '59. And it just seemed like it would be a great job, which it has been.

JH In 1959 in Winthrop, Francis Lufkin was the project superintendent then.

PS Right.

JH What was the Winthrop operation like then?

PS It was a small operation. I guess we had about twenty-eight or thirty guys and I love the country, I mean, I still do. It's beautiful country up there and it was pretty laid back and then we had the LaGrande sub base. So, we covered the Okanogans and the Eagle Cap. And it was a long time. I guess I've through now, four different jump crews and kind of everything gets faded out. You remember the good jumps and the good people. And like my memories are just beautiful country... Eagle Cap and the Satan and the Baker and all that nice country that I got to see.

JH What was the training procedures like?

PS It was pretty similar except you had canvas suits and we had a tower. We had a shock tower and we had a let down procedure and everything. Winthrop had a pretty big PT program at the time... physical training. The Baker and Snoqualmie... Baker gets hit about every five years and they didn't want to take the helicopters so they weren't calling us. So, Francis [Lufkin] instigated a real strong PT program. And I think that was one thing about the Winthrop bases... carried over, that they were real strong in physical training. I came in in real good shape, so, it was a rough pro... rough training but I was down in Florida for the spring and I was in real good shape when I came in. But, the real thing, contending with the heat, I think, was the big thing. Down south, I mean, it's ninety-five... 100 degrees there in the summer... you put those suits on... Redding's probably the worst for that.
JH Did they have any type of fire training or jumper training?

PS Oh, yeah. You had a... you got your first aid... standard first aid card and map reading and try to get us out on a fire. If there wasn't a fire... if there was one while you were a rookie, they tried to get you out on one. If not, they started one... a small fire and so... basically the... training is, as I... I haven't been involved with the rookie program here. But watching our rookies and everything, it's pretty much the same. It's similar things you do.

JH What brought you to Alaska?

PS Well, in '59 is the first year they came up here and Kay Johnson's brother, called Dean Johnson, was up here and he was writing all these letters back about Alaska and of course all of us was sitting here as Kay read them and going, "Wow, that sounds great". But, '59 and '60... I had a great year in '60. I was real happy with Winthrop and then just wound up after the '61 season, decided I'd try Alaska. And they accepted me, so, I spent '62 up here. It was quite a bit... that's a big difference between Alaska in '62 and then I came back to Alaska in '76. I jumped Winthrop in '74 and '75 and I came back here in '76. I was gone for 12 years. But I think there's a big difference, mostly in the natives up here in Alaska, and the intensity of the fire fighting.

JH What was the Alaska crew like during that time period? Orville Lupper, I believe, was the project superintendent. It was a new project, new techniques, new bureaucracy, whatever.

PS Well, basically, we had a DC-3 and a Goose for a jump ship. So, the DC-3 we just, ah... and we're using the municipal airport. And it wasn't quite as high keyed as now. I mean, if we went 400 miles, and then by the time the Goose got... by the time the DC-3 got there, it took a long time. So... and I think we stayed on the fires longer and it wasn't such a... they didn't fly us over everyday. It just wasn't such a high intensity. And we probably didn't cover such an extensive of an area but we had a few long fires. It was more, I guess, the word I think about would be more laid back. It wasn't quite as intense. Not that you worked and everything but just laid back in the sense, there wasn't as much intensity as many jump ships and we had [inaudible] of the sub-base in McGrath but even that was a new thing. It was a small crew again. I think we had twenty-four or thirty guys and we had about twenty-four Missoula people come up for a month as a backup crew. So, that's what was happening back there in '62.

JH Where was the base located at?

PS It was up about three and a half miles. So, we get a fire call, and we'd load things in the big state truck and put our bales on seamless sacks and carry everything down to the DC-3 at the main airport and then take off. Fly for a couple of hours
and then you'd suit up in the airplane jump out on the fire. And they were using the Army and Air Force helicopters... those big banana helicopters they had at the time. I believe they were paying 100 bucks an hour rental and the Army and Air Force were pretty happy because it gave their guys training. So, we were using Wayne Wright and Galena, basically. So, I think probably, I don't really know this, I suspect that we got a lot of activity around out of Fairbanks and Galena for that reason. We... McGrath was just about starting up at the time. They had a... one or two contract helicopters, small ones but, I remember getting retrieved a lot from fires by the military. It was a good deal for bot... I think they both felt it was a good deal. It was. You know, they got their training. The guys got their training going around picking up people, and that was a pretty good price to pay an hour. I think it was about 100 bucks an hour.

JH Was the jumper organization similar to what it is today, within the ranks? The jumper relationship to the BLM [Bureau of Land Management] management?

PS Yeah. I would think so. With changes... with changes the your jump bases is kind of the character and personality of the foreman or manager which varies, you know, different people. Hal Dutton was the best, as far as I'm concerned. You couldn't find a better manager than him. He was amazing. That's probably why I've been around here so long. Then other people might say other things about that but some are a little more tighter, a little more looser, different personalities. I don't think it's anyone that's really been or have anything really nasty to say about them. The thing is that there is a difference in personality and that goes down. But, on a whole, I mean, I find this job has been... I've worked other jobs... I've been about everything you can think of. I've worked for factories, the bank, I've been a fisherman, about everything, cut wood, been in academia and it's just been real fun. It's been real fun. It's working out. In fact I was wrapping about that with someone. You come in this job and you see these macho guys... these supermen going out there and battling fires and then when you get in here. I found a lot of real sensitive intelligent people I've met... I met... I have some real good friends over the years. Some real nice people, I've met. And I think beside the country, I've got to see and that's really great, both down South and Alaska. It's just in general the friends I've met over the years. That's been a real important thing in the job.

JH What type of people do you think get attracted to this job?

PS It's kind of a variety it's interesting. I think [INAUDIBLE] you spend... well, I've also climbed and I'm a dedicated skier and climbing is probably the other place you really get to know someone if you're out on a fire with them for about 3, 4, or 5 days, swatting mosquitoes and getting dirty and being miserable, you know, and also, the fun of it. I think you really.... But I think it's exciting for a lot of guys to stay
around and say longer than 3, 4, or 5 years, is the people you get to know. You get to know people but that's a social way around the job and around an office or something. You get out in the woods with someone and start doing things with them, and you just get to know people. You can't sit around for eight hours waiting for a D-man and after you've worked for a couple of days on a fire and you're camping out with someone without knowing someone. Getting into... that's part of the thing... the communication. And after a while, you got the real realization, that uh... you're getting some pretty intense communication with people.

JH  Do you think they're the same type of people today as they were back in '59... '60... '61?

PS  Yeah... yeah, I really do. I think we get a lot of people... you know, it's just a variety of people, I mean. And you get people who's students and doing a summer job and then career people who want to go on to the government. You get people who kind of look at the this job... they're kind of skibums. They have the winters free. That's one reason I came back to the job. And people who travel. In a sense, I think the job kind of brings everybody down to a place where they got a little more sensitivity and aware of things. I really feel that way. I've been really... it's been interesting to me looking at that. I think one of the things is that you do... jumpings really problem danger statistically but one reason is, you're real aware of things. You're real aware of your brother and the guy across the way and yourself. And everybody's checking everybody and they're aware of the safety factor that comes in. And of course, the jumping is always a high. You're aware of that. You can't be swinging around too much when you're 2000 feet above the ground and losing your mind. I still get a kick out of it. It's not like... well, you know, maybe... kind of like walking out the door and stop doing it.

JH  What a... reverting back to Winthrop and the time that you spent down South, was there as much traveling then as... [INAUDIBLE] organization in the south as there is today?

PS  I think Winthrop is kind of a semi exclusive example of not traveling too much. I was lucky though in '59, my second and third fire jumps were in Missoula. My first four fire jumps were four different states... Washington, Montana, Idaho, and Oregon, so. But, I was the only rookie and Missoula called six of us over. I got the Bob Marshall and the Bitterroot. I really think Winthrop jumpers really didn't know anything about Missoula and I really got a first hand shot of Missoula over a week on my rookie year. My two fire... second... third fire jumps were over there. The Bob Marshall is beautiful. I was just going to say, I think Winthrop is kind of isolated. And I was just going to say I think that went around [INAUDIBLE] Francis Lufkin and he was just that way. Winthrop got kind of isolated and so we didn't do a lot of traveling except to LaGrande detail. So, I just got the feeling that there was more of uh... traveling on other bases.
That was one thing about Alaska, when I came up here, and I really don't mean this as a negative thing about Winthrop. It was kind of a semi negative thing that you don't get around as much. When I got to be an Alaska jumper, hell, I got to meet all kinds of people. It's more of a family feeling up here. Like I know a lot of people from almost every base now. Because we got these big busts up here and people move in and out. You get to feeling more... especially for me in Alaska, now as I say, I don't know... I haven't jumped say Missoula or McCall or something, but, in Alaska I get the feeling that... what... 350... 400 guys doing this every year and you get more of a feeling you know everybody, so....

JH Was that the case in the early '60's. I noticed on the master log that is up in Mike's office that they'd have the regular '50 man booster crew or so... twenty-five men come up from down South and like you said, they'd spend a month. But, did they have the large influx of booster crews above regular crews from down South that they do today?

PS Well, I'm kind of... I've never been in a... as an... I guess I was kind of thinking of as an isolated example because I've never been over there, that I grant [you], I prefer that. [INAUDIBLE], all the time I'm doing this and I've never been around very long, except on this crew. So I was here only 1 year, in '62, and that's like an isolated example. I wouldn't try to make any generalizations from that. But we had, ah... given the twenty guys we... twenty-four guys from Missoula, and, so... [INAUDIBLE]. I like that. I got to know a lot of those people that year and it was just nice. You know, there's a gripe about that too... you lose overtime. But one good thing about that is you can keep your base smaller. As I say, sometimes you get kind of irritated when they call people up like that. But, in the long run it's really a positive thing because you meet people and.... I just seen it, the smaller the crew, the more kind of communication you have. You know, just the more contact you have with people. Then, there's a trade off there. I think that was one thing. Like it was nice about having a 30 man base in Winthrop but that's another reason we didn't go on trips very much, too, because you can't get strung out too much. There's probably a medium somewhere about sixty... seventy people... fifty people.

JH You jumped '62 and then laid off for a time period?

PS Yeah, I was gone twelve years.

JH Then what brought you back?

PS I was just... I never figured... I don't know... I don't know if anybody's ever laid off.... Well, to me, you know, I started, I was about twenty... twenty one and I was a real good athlete. I played sports in high school but I was a high school drop out. To me, it was the first time I ever had the feeling of being a team feeling with people. You know, that close feeling
of working and you know, it's fun when you get out there on a fire sometime and you work your butt off and it's always being on jumper fires because the difference there is when you get a bunch of jumpers together, you can depend on them. You don't have to be telling someone what to do. The guys are racing to set up camp and it's just great. Everybody does their job and it's unique. It's real uniqueness. I love these eight to sixteen man jumper fires and, ah... well, anyway, it was like... it was one of the neatest things I had done.

I wound up going to school and everything. I wound up actually, kind of working for the Forest Service again as a patrolman. And just wound up putting some applications in and getting accepted. Wanted to come back to jumping. I was thirty seven years old and I come back and I felt like one of these guys, you know, you see these guys that talk about their winning basketball team or football team and then went back, you know, you wind up in you forties with a big paunch drinking beer with your friends. I got to go back. I've been doing this for ten... eleven years now... ten... eleven summers and it's been great. It's been more fun the second time around. I think I got a... it's more of a sit back watching it happen. It's kind of nice. I feel probably more confident than I did back then. It's hard to... that prospect at forty to be so at twenty. Sometimes you get a little shagrinned about it... all that crazy intensity stuff. I felt real positive about coming back. In fact, coming on this, I was talking to a guy who was trying to come on to be a jumper and gave him a recommendation, I think somebody from Redmond. I got talking with him and he wasn't sure what he wanted to do. He had some schooling he wanted to do and it came out... I was thinking about that I wouldn't trade the experience of jumping if someone offered me a million dollars right now. That's farfetched. No one would do that but there's no way I could get that experience back. A million dollars wouldn't be worth it. So, that's how I feel about the job... about fourteen... fifteen seasons. It's been a special job.

JH You noticed that difference now between the young people coming in and the older ones that have been around a long time... more professional outlook so to speak, if that's the term?

PS Yeah, you could [COUGH] excuse me... it varies from individual. Like, up here in Alaska I really like the rookies who just seem to... they seem to move in real easy. We have a hard training... a real hard physical training. I've noticed that. I think from observation that they really put them through a real hard physical training up here. It's probably... Mike Clarkson was responsible for a lot of that, and whoever he had working with him. And it's basically kind of using that motivation. The guys who don't want to do it, they drop out, and so you get guys who are really motivated. I'm not talking about the fraternity harassment, I mean the good... the good hard physical stuff. It's one of those things, it's almost like the military, like the Marine Corps. They give you a hard boot camp and the guys drop that just don't want to do it, and the guys who want to do it get a good individual. They really go out there and work and fit in.
Maybe... I'm not sure about the other places. Seems to me the other places are pretty much the same way, though. They work it the same way, though. And if... while were on this, that's my thing about the women jumpers. I really hate to see them lower the standards. I'm all for equal rights and everything, but I hate to see that happen, because you have to have that motivation. It just make a different type character, and a different type... it's... you can't really objectify that. You can't objectify that. No way. It's a subjective... but it's there. And you'll see it when your back's up against the wall and you have to run a chainsaw all night, or you'll see the extra effort someone will put in. And you want to say, "Ah, the hell with this," as far as this is going. We get a bunch of guys get together, and it's not even overtime anymore, and all of a sudden there'll be at a point where we say, "Let's try and get this son-of-a-bitch. Let's just try." And then it's "OK." And you go it. It's crazy and you got feeling and you got this whole snap of second energy, and you watch guys work eight or nine hours. And I think that's the really neat thing about the jumpers. You can got on abut all that kind of thing, but there's that cohesiveness that comes from that kind of little bit of something people pull up from the bottom and do that. And it was a lot of kind of you're-not't-gonna-let-your-buddies-down.

JH Something that comes from you inside, rather than a physical ability?

PS I think, probably the... I've been in the military, but I haven't been in war, thank goodness. I'm not really... but you feel afterwards... we had some Vietnam guys up here... they'd come back here because they get that same feeling that they had in 'Nam, but you don't have to be killing people. You don't have to be watching your buddy's head blown off. It's a nice feeling, I'm sure.

JH Do you think that's... as long as we're talking about the caliber of people who jumped, that something special inside, do you think that's common bond people who engage in other, well, hazardous activities? Scuba diving, hang gliding, sky diving, rock climbing, do you think that's common...?

PS I've seen climbing... I've experienced it in climbing. But the thing with climbing, though, you usually you're climbing so low or with one or two people, you're not gonna be climbing with a lot of people, and I think... usually you've got a climbing partner, people you like... you get along with. And the really neat thing about jumping for me personally is when you get a crew of sixty or thirty or forty people and if your in a group of people that don't really get along too well... I mean, it has nothing to do with... they're just different personalities. It has nothing to do with anything, you know, except the different personalities. And you got to be equal, you don't know who you're gonna be with. So you might be with a guy you don't like so much, and so you got to want to be out there with him for three days, and so you got to get to know him. You're gonna give
a little bit and he's gonna give a little bit and so it really broadens you, I think. You're not picking the same guy to go out with. I like that aspect. You get the same feeling, except you get different people. Then you have to kind of... it's a real interesting psychological education. I've wrapped with that about other guys, they felt the same way about it, once you get in. It's real good for techniques of human communication and [INAUDIBLE] people. It's kind of a side to the job, and it's really true.

JH What type of differences do you see, or did you notice, when you came back in the '70s? Was there a different philosophy of firefighting, job purpose, treatment of employees, treatment of the jumpers?

PS Not... not really so much. You know, I was... I came back I worked under Frances, and of course, Bill... Bill Moody was in charge of '74 and I know Bill real well, we were friends for years. And, basically, it wasn't that... as I say, personality differences, but it was pretty much the same from my viewpoint except the parachute system was a little bit better. Maybe it's been progressive, like. I mean, the T-10 had less opening shock and it's more forgiving in position going out the airplane. It just seemed the better chute. And then we got the XB-5 or the FS-12, as the Forest Service calls it, that turns a little better. Of course, ultimately on a square system, I mean, that's really... I'm really enthused with that. So I think the parachute system has gotten better. Responsibly for turning and such and.... Airplanes are a little faster, but I haven't seen that much done... a difference for us. We cover more ground, but.... I think... it's... sometimes it's hard, it's almost like it's a whole different life from going... it's gonna... as my twenty five years ago, you know, when I made my first fire jump my first year. It was twelve years difference gone in between. But... so it kind of fades out. The things that I say, as I remember them, the people I've met, and the nice places I've been in, and those times when as far as when you put that special effort out in any place. But it was really similar, and I like that, too, in a sense. There's a real similarity to the people and the working conditions. That's carried over, I really feel that's carried over just because it's smokejumping. That's the nice part. And the difference I see, it's gotten a little more hectic. I think we've taken this too seriously and gotten too intense. And I liked that laid-back... I'm not talking about laziness, I'm talking about a little more laid-back attitude where, you know, you do you're best and if it doesn't happen, well that's OK too. There's not this frenzy. And, I think, the bureaucracy has come in too hard. I saw that even in the regular Forest Service. I worked as patrolman in California. I was writing up my... finishing up my thesis, and so I worked there in the summertime, and would go back down to Eastern Berkeley Library for about two Winters, so I was in the Bay area and I worked on Yosemite line... Region-5, and I could see that coming in there real strong. The bureaucracy and the regulations. There's nothing wrong with regulations, it's just when the
regulations cover stupidity. It's just... they're just there. I think that's coming into the jumpers more. We even have it up here where we have more freedom. Now, I'm not talking about license to do anything you fucking want, you gotta... you gotta have some rules. It's just how you implement the rules and what the rules cover. I think it's real easy for a bureaucrat to sit in his office in Washington, D.C. and just put a blanket number on a rule and say that's how it will be done. And you get out in the field and it doesn't work too well.

JH You think the jumpers, as a person, are the type of people who start bucking when that type of outside influence is injected into their normal operation?

PS I think you have a certain contingent of jumpers who do, because that's part of their job. You know, sometimes I... you think, "Would I have been a criminal if it wasn't for this job?" [LAUGH] You know, you... because, you know, it's like a... that's one of the other things to me, I go back and talk to people I know down South and they just can't conceive of this. And you just can't explain the intangibles to them. You know, they see Red Skies Over Montana or some bullshit like that, and they think were superheros saving Bambi and all that crap, and they miss all the other stuff. The communication and that real spirit where you will, you can go put that extra for another guy or just for the job, just for the fuck of it. And it's a certain type of individual. As I said, I think you really... in general, this... you find... you get a little more intelligent, a little more sensitive person coming in the [INAUDIBLE] They have to be, because that's why they were stimulated by coming in here in the first place. And with that kind of person, he doesn't... you have more individual, and it's not that they don't follow you, or their safe and not gonna screw their buddy, but regulation for regulation's sake and rules for rule's sake doesn't sit too well when you're standing on these dumb, stupid rules that some one set out to make it easier for themselves and not make waves up there. You know, that's the big difference between the two. I was talking with a guy, safety officer here, and I'm all for safety, but not just following rules safety, but real safety. And there's a big difference between following rules and being safe, as you well know.

JH It's interesting that most people's opinions of the jumper is, "How many jumps do you have? Did you ever land in a tree?" Just the shallow part of the jump, but don't really have anything to do with the person who does the job.

PS It's a real experiential thing. You know, that they way you want to say "existential." I mean, you got to experience it. I think... you know, it's terrible, like I've been married a few times and had lady-friends and I really... it's just really difficult bringing your wife or lady-friend to a party or something, because jumpers get around and start telling jump stories. I mean, it's something uniquely yours. Climbers do the same thing, and you can't describe it. Vietnamese vets talk
about their war experience, and unless you've gone through that, you really can't share it. It's funny, sometimes I'll sit in side and think about, like "I hung up the rats in the trees and gone up and eat them." You know, there's all this lingo that goes one, and has absolutely no... makes no sense to someone outside the business and it would be boring. And here's all this excitement about some stupid fire five years ago. And if you're... even if you're a guy who goes on, you know, if you surf boarded into a fire, roller skated in, it's just not the same. I've done that. I've been a ground pounder, so called, I've grounded a lot of fires when I was on trail crew, when I was on the patrol job. You're on the fires, but you just don't remember the fires, and jumping, it adds all that to it. You know, the jump and you're already... you're kind of high and psyched up and ready to get on the fire, and the intensity of commitment to the job, it just makes the fire... a lot of fires more memorable... that's the word, I guess. So you're just thinking... and of course, John Dubayne (?) was in here a while ago, and like, he said something two years ago, "Don't let the truth hurt a good story." When you get around telling these bullshit stories, you know, you start wondering, and some guys tell stories... you know, in fact I took... I went to a story telling conference, like, two years ago in Denver... I got teaching credentials and worked with some problems kids so I was living in Boulder and took them out cross country skiing and camping, and got into story telling. They really liked that, making up stories at night. And I just see that's a real important part of being, like, around a camp fire and on a fire, you have certain guys who tell a good story and it's just a... you have no T.V., you have no books... I wouldn't take a book out there and no T.V. and nothing to do, so people started telling stories. That's another element of communication that people are missing. We just don't... we have video games and we go into bars and they have juke boxes and go into people's house... T.V.s and stereos. You get out in the woods, you have other guys to talk to. So that's when the story tellers kind of come to the forefront.

JH What type of, you know, like, do you perceive that are available in the jump bases, seems like they're a little smarter, been around a lot, a little more philosophical about life, and a little more down to earth than other types, do you think that's true?

PS Yeah. I do. I'm a compulsive reader and I've been a compulsive reader all my life, it just happened that way. And I find jumpers well read, in general. You know, I've mean, I can... I love... that's part of the bullshit sessions, too, you get into. How long can you talk about fires, or sex, or shit and all the other... the little boy... twelve year old talk, which is fine, I mean, it's a boys camp. And then you get tired of that and you start talking about, you know, books, and politics, and philosophy, and things like that. And it's been real exciting. You know, as I say, you get out there, you get around a guy a lot and some of the barriers break down and it's real stimulating that way. That's been one of my joys, too, in the Summer, just
having conversations, and I say again, I have a number of people that are personal friends... jumpers, I mean, that's how... I don't consider them jumpers, they're personal friends.

[INTERUPTION]

JH It's been mentioned up here in my talks with other jumpers that it appears to have been a pretty decent attitude change when Hal Dutton took over the base from the old Alaska—was—a-good-place—for-the-down-south-boys-to-retire. They got old, or fat, or didn't give a shit. And when they were on fire, if it goes over the hill, so what; and then Hal came in seemed to turn the place around. Do you think that's true?

PS I'm getting in a strange position with that. Because I hear about that, and, as I say, I came back in '74... '75. And Winthrop, there was that intensity at Winthrop, I mean, you know, you... Winthrop you just went for the fire. There was a real more close-knit crew, and, maybe, a little too puts to macho. And it wasn't quite as macho as you think if you worked there. There was a lot of... what do you want to say... up front stuff to intimidate people sometimes. You know, you get the 250 foot let down rope, I mean, I was scared of the big trees, too, you know. And you went with the baker, or something. But, in that sense I was... I came here in '76 and I hear about that, so, like, it's hearsay on me. And I suspect that was true, but when I came here, that wasn't happening. I think Hal was responsible for that. And... it was real unique. I had a great deal of respect for Dutton personally, as a person, not just as a manager. He had that unique quality, he could go both... you know, manager is a tough place. I haven't been in that position, but I could see you gotta go both ways. You gotta go up above you and down below you. And so what happens to a lot of people, they start getting concerned about up above and forget about down below them. Not usually vice versa too much. But Hal could sit... he liked it. It kind of stimulated him. He was a good politic up above, and he also took care of the boys down below. You couldn't give a lot of shit with him, he would come down, but there was a lot more room and the job got done. It was just a nice environment here. I mean, so when I came here I didn't feel as bunch of people retired and I didn't even know anything about Alaska when I came back. And I found I fit in very well. And I had room to kind of lay-back and be myself and rap with people and get out on fires and go for it. And I found a lot of other people doing the same thing. And their PT program... I'm really strong into PT. I stay in shape, that's part of my lifestyle. And I found a lot of people were doing the same thing. You know, we get these kind of a stereotypes and they stay with them... with a base. And I still miss Hal, he's just a neat person.

JH What type of first aid program do the jumpers have now?

PS From what I hear, real positive, real strong. Probably Sam Houston implemented that. We had a number of guys who were
paramedics who headed the program. Like, I'm a EMT-2 [Emergency Medical Training], and were up to EMT-2 status now and were all EMTs. All my time, the government paid for it. The government's paid for my EMT-1 training, my -2 training and get to ride the ambulance for a week with the Fairbanks paramedics and I feel it's a real strong program.

JH So, you've had occasions to use that training?

PS In... not so much in the jump. Now and then, we have probably been real lucky up here in the jumping. I have had to use it on myself. I broke out my shoulder real bad. I separated it and used it on myself. And [INAUDIBLE] we've had nothing traumatic. We don't have as many traumatic injuries as way down south say in Winthrop. But riding the ambulance was a real good experience because I did get to work with those people... the paramedics. And they were professionals, and that was probably the best experience I had anywhere, being able to ride with them for a week every year. And I'd get things like gun shot wounds, stabbings, heart attacks, and other things like that. And it's a good intense program.

JH Is there much of a relationship between the jumper's and the paramedic's world... civilian world?

PS Well, the one bad thing about it is being isolated on this military base, no one likes that. I mean, it's a typical, dumb military base. And I go out of my way not to have any problems with these people. [LAUGH] I'm in the military, and I don't like the military, and that's where it is. You philosophize on that; I go back to the minute man concept... the Revolutionary War period where if you needed people you could get them. You don't need a standing army--but that's something else. But anyhow, you wind up getting different, like, colonels in here. Actually this last like colonel was a nit-wit. The guy before that was pretty open. This last guy they had was pretty paranoid and makes it even harder. Mostly it's the gate, coming in off this gate. I don't have to be smuggling in any kind of secret drugs in here. I don't do that thing. That's not my bit. But still, you know, it's a... it's a hassle sometimes working with the military. But one thing, I've gone out of my way, and I think there's a lot of close relations between [INAUDIBLE]. We were kind of separated here by a couple blocks, but I think there's more of a family feeling, maybe, than down south sometimes. Some of the bases get more isolated down there, have more problems with the... I think, again, it comes down to Hal Dutton, too, though. Because he was well liked by people and the administrative office too. In talking about this one thing I can give you a plug right here about the spare program. I got trained last year I made seven... eight fire jumps this year and I think my most innovative things that have come up is the spare program. I'm really very positive on that, and I really think the Forest Service is foolish in not trying to see what's happening here. And I'm talking about the grunt old guy who jumped over 200 rounds and they trained you last year. And I was dubious, you know, and I realized that I
had to go out there and be real aware of what I was doing. I mean, can you teach an old dog new tricks? And I have almost instinctive habits. And it's really a unique system. I'm really... I hurt my shoulder here, I had to go back around a couple times, coming in backwards in the wind. And went... after my training last August, I did a write-up, you know, a critique. And what came to my mind was that I just really thank those guys for the innovation and all the creativity that went into that program... all that dedication and time.

JH Seems like the jumpers have a tendency to find something that's considered safe and then they have a tendency to stagnate off. Like the 5-A was... the twenty-eight foot was around for twenty years; the 5-A was around for about ten or so; the T-10 was around for ten or so. Do you think that's true with the BLM organization as a whole?

PS Yeah, you can see that. There was an interesting book... I can't remember what it was written about... some guy had a sociological PhD on how they choose forest rangers. I just banged into it in the library one time. I think in general, I mean, I'm not knocking this, it's just something to consider that you wind up having a lot of people getting into positions of so-called authority because they stayed around long enough, they didn't make waves. And I think you wind up having that. And I think that's good in some ways, you don't want to be too off base, I mean if you get into trouble. But then there's a real stagnant thinking in that, because the guy just sits around and worries about retiring, he doesn't want to do anything to rock the boat or get himself in trouble. So you got to have... you know, and this is Al. I think Al was an innovative guy that got bored. He wanted to get out there and do a few things, and he was willing to try a few things that we were talking about. And I think a lot of other places, not all other places, but you have... it varies, but you do have a lot of people who, I think are... you know, it's a line, you can get too much on the conservative side. And I'm not knocking conservatism, you don't want a bunch of wackoes up here killing themselves and getting in trouble. Again, talking about Alaska, I think with that more open attitude was some latitude and how Al treated us. You got guys taking individual responsibility. We still have it, but it's not so strong now. It's just... it's mostly it's not really anybody's responsibility to [INAUDIBLE] but the first guy in the door was fire boss and the last guy was monkey who checked everybody. I watched that system and it's really... I think it was a neat system because they made people to be more aware of their responsibilities. You know, if you're on a fire, you can bitch about how the fire boss is treating you and how the tactics are going, but if you're going to be fire boss next time because you're going to be the first man in the door, you find yourself a lot different. You start helping the other guy because "Hey, man! I'm going to be on the fire next time I'm going to be fire boss." And you don't get so stagnant and there's a lot more helping with that kind of thing. People just... I've just noticed that people just started taking more individual
responsibility for themselves and the job. And I really like that. And I just saw that happen this year.

JH This land settlement that finally came down changed... greatly aided the jumper program up here, rather than hinder it in that now BLM jumpers are the initial attack force for the entire state. What kind of relationship do you see evolving, or has evolved between the jumpers, BLM government organization, and the various native organizations, or state organizations?

PS Well, I don't know. Again, you know, getting my opinion from the down... the grunt side, so I don't know about the meeting and stuff. I just kind of get the gossip. Also, I'm curious so I talk to people, but I have no... I knew about the implement plans and everything, but there's a definite change happening. I see a cycler pattern coming here. I see more of a demise of the jump program, I don't know, because the power structure has shifted. The power structure has shifted from the main control being at Fairbanks to it's going on to the district people, because they have the say. I was talking to a few of the district people and they have the say if we jump a fire or not out there. And I really see no... who know's, but there's definitely a change coming in. And, of course, the Indian lands... the Indians... there's three different types of Indian lands: there's individual owned land, there's village owned land, and there's land land. And they have no real status. They're real smart, I mean, they got some lawyers [LAUGH] and they're planning... they saw what happened to the reservation system, you know, down south. And they got their villages and, you know, they just got a good thing going. They're getting a lot of flak, but a lot of senses... I was down there on my last fire, it was in Kwidimandehues (?), and it was about 12:00 o'clock and Larry Nelson and I were walking down and the other ten guys were kind of telling jump stories and we went down, and there was this old man down there... old man, about forty, about my age... but he had... he was carrying about fifteen salmon he caught... dalby (?) red salmon, and he was out there cutting them up. He had his twenty dogs along the river there and he must have had 4,000 fish. And I was watching him cut those salmon. It was a thing of art to watch him, I mean, he was stringing the old salmon off and gutting them out and he just... you know, there was years and years working. You know, he's... 4,000 salmon every year went to his dogs, a couple moose heads up there. He had the life style. I mean, it's not like the reservation system down south. The Indians are still living off the land up here. It's different, and I think a lot of these administrators come up here and try to treat the Indians the same way they've been treating Indians down there, and the Indians are not in that place. They're really making a stand up here. And it's their land and they're protecting their life style. You know, I'm not making the Indians perfect, but it's interesting, it's exciting just to watch that. I'm considering teaching in the villages here just for that reason. I really think that it's a whole different place. Like, teaching up there would be like the one room schoolhouse in the old days. And you just can't go in there and
say, "You're gonna do this." They have a right to what they want to say, so... it's gonna change, you know, I'm going off on a tangent, but....

JH How do the jumpers fit into that lifestyle when they run into FS Indian crews on various fires?

PS It varies. Like, I really like working with the Eskimos. You have to put your... you have to make a stand. I mean, the point is, like, I had this one girl from Houston who was just kind of anti-white in some ways, and as I said, I'm not saying that's wrong or right, but she was saying, "You guys come up from down south, you white guys that think you know everything about Alaska." And I just sat there and looked at her and I said, "Wait a minute," you know, I says, "your ancestors have been here for thousands of years and I can not... only drop fire packs and we have all kinds of food. I couldn't live out here. You guys have been living out here. You know way more about trapping, and hunting, and fishing, everything... dog teams. And I know way more about fire than you know, so lets get back there and put the fire out." And we did. And also, I keep the time, they know that too. So [INAUDIBLE] some time, I think. And you have to get in and talk to them. I mean, they're really neat people. You can't be exclusive, you got to get out there... you can't sit over in your camp. You get in there and start talking to them. The people are really fun. They're willing to come out and they're very close contact people. They live in the villages where it's cold and dark all Winter. They're very into communication; they're very emotionally [INAUDIBLE]; they're really into that... what do you want to say... insightful communication. They really know where you are. And some white guys think they're dumb, and they're not dumb. If you think they're dumb, you're in trouble. So you go in there and realize where they are and they'll pick up on you right away. And it's... the one trouble is alcohol, and you got to put your put your foot down. Like, I was talking to Gary Renquist who had trouble with a guy who came in drunk and had a couple bottles of whiskey on him... he brought them in with him. And Gary did the proper thing, he just said, "OK, you're off... you're off time." And the guy went all through, and he said, "Nope. You're not working. You're drunk. You're off." And the guy gave him shit and it wound up by the time they left the guy was talking to him. But was real... he put his foot down and said: "No." And you got to do that if that comes up. And it's worked out.

JH Seems like the BLM fire organization up here at... with the relationship to the Indians almost makes it obligatory that the jumper be half politician...

PS Yeah.

JH ... half human being, rather than just a member of a intercrew besides their own camp, like you mentioned.

PS I have a little bitch about this and, as I say, I'm probab-
ly... this is probably my last year, I think, for a number of reasons. That's another thing about the bureaucracy coming up. I'd like to put this in. It's not really a bitch, it's a comment. I'm not trying to be negative here, but it's a comment on things I've noticed. And like this red card system that's come up. And it's not... you have to take S-courses and qualify and blah-blah-blah. For years the jumper has been in a place where if he was needed he was fire boss, line boss, the whole bit. And guys were willing and able to do that when they had to. And like, crew bosses that worked with the Indians, and it was an acceptance that was part of the job. You weren't well paid, but it was part of that traditional feeling of when... you know, you might have an easy fire where you got to go fishing for a day and lay back for awhile, and then all of a sudden you'd be right in the middle of all this shit. You know, handling four crews and kind of just accepted that. And I think that it made it another unique education experience up here. It didn't what your red card said, or how many S-courses you had, the training was out there. And a lot of times, a guy who'd be a GS-7 and line on the overhead, would let one of the pogues take over and kind of be his director. And I saw that happen, and it's real neat to do that. I've done that, and have it happen to me. And that's a real... it on-line... on-line experience, it's that journeyman apprenticeship and that's the only way you really learn. And that's going out, and I really hate to see that. And I don't know [what] to say... what can [be] do[ne] about it, but, like, again, it's the computer, it's having all the laws, and all the forms right. And that's nice and easy and efficient for these people who are up in the offices, but it's not the way it happens. [LAUGH] I found out one day, I was in that office and I was going out... it was the end of the year, and I was getting everything clear to leave. And I was looking at all these files, and people, and standard file reports, I was thinking, it really comes down to, no matter how a guy or a lady gets into a fire, roller skates, or ford jumping, or walking a horse back, however, it's the person down there banging on the fire with a spruce bough, or a pulaski, or a suma sack, or whatever... whatever it happens to be... or a bag of some kind, or whatever, and that's what's happening. That's fire fighting. And there's a whole service organization you look at. And the pyramid's turned upside down. The people who are in the offices in the Winter time they're... they're the ones who start thinking they're the important people rather than just... no one's more important than anybody else. But it just turned... the fire fighters are the guys on the line or the lady who's doing the thing. And now, these people up there, they're making all these plans and directing... I'm familiar with computers, I've done a little bit of computer work and computers are a great tool, but they have a lot of set-backs. They can do just so much on the computer.

[END OF SIDE A]

[BEGIN SIDE B]

PS They can do just so much with a computer... computer. And
they got... the pyramid's inverted, rather than being service people, they think that they're controlling what's happening. And that's a real mistake, I think. I think a lot of those people should go out and bang on fire for a while and get more... and maybe some of the people banging on the fire should go up and maybe work in the administrative office for awhile even as a runner or something. [INTERRUPTION]

JH Do you think the philosophy of fire fighting has drastically changed since you started in 1959?

PS Oh, well, I have two views on that personally. I mean, so, again, as I say, I'm not implementing any policy, but I'm a geographer/biologist by profession, you might say... those are my majors and I'm an initial attack fire fighter and I'm [inaudible] inclined; I'm also a climber, a hiker, and I'm really into the land. And I really believe in protecting the system. I think it can be used and everything. But fire has been a natural process for millions of years, and let-burn policy is, in some places, makes sense. But that's going to be a hard one with what's happening. We've really been pushing, like, "fire is the devil," and went out there beating on it all the time... this hard-core initial attack. I don't... I don't think it's been working that way, but then let-burn brings up a lot of other things. It kind of takes it out a fire's hands and start's putting it in other people. It's just a weird space... it's a weird space with that. One thing I can say about putting out our own fires, you don't get hurt or anything. They talk about money being spent, but all that money goes back in the system and keeps the economy going. This let-burn is definitely going to have a whole new way of looking at things. It'd be interesting to see what happens. The let-burn... also, division of land. It just makes it a real hassle when you get out there. Alaska's different than down south. You don't have roads, just villages and you're out there 100 miles from nowhere... 200 miles from nowhere... 50 miles to nowhere and try to figure out where this piece of land is. It'd be interesting to see what happens. Like, I worked with the California... the Stanislaus and we had California Division of Forests and the Park Service and they did mutual aid areas [INAUDIBLE] the same conservative thinking they're gonna have trouble. They're gonna inevitably... they're gonna have to have some innovation on what they're doing, it seems like to me. As I said, again, this is my observation, I don't know. But they've a lot of trouble with... they let-burn places and there's a little section of Indian lands that they have to protect and so... it's political where the [INAUDIBLE] are. It's going to be interesting to see what happens.

JH Think the jumpers are more susceptible to the... these political inroads now than they were in Winthrop or when you came back in mid-'70s?

PS Yeah. Since... you know, again, this is my speculation, this is nothing... this is Joe Blow junk from the bottom. I just see... I just feel kind of a change coming and what happens. One
suspicion I have, I feel the demise of the jump program, I feel, up in Alaska. But that's happened down south in places. Like, Redding is all... Redding's not really a jump base any more, they work out of the region. I don't see any reason for that. I was down in Redding in '76 for a month and I think they can use the jumpers a lot more than then they implementing... as they should down there. That's my personal feeling, whatever reasons. And I see that happening here with these districts having more control. The first thing they'll do, of course, is... it's natural, the guy who's in charge of the FCOSFM roll hires people, and they become his friends, of course his friends... he wants to get them on fires. There's nothing nasty, but I think they'll probably get [INAUDIBLE] and using their people a lot more. It's just that they'll be pulling regular jumpers [INAUDIBLE] it's just natural. There's not evil intention there, it's just that shift of power.

JH What are some of your more memorable jumping experiences that you'd like to recall?

PS Oh, goodness. I had that... when the Winthrop reunion came up I had [INAUDIBLE] there had been so many good jumps and so many fine people, you know. I guess it's nice I survived and it's been just... just worked with a lot of fine and graceful people. It's been... well, there's been some nice fires, like this one we had on Kodiak Island. I had never been on Kodiak Island and right there on the coast, you know, tide pools and foxes funning around, and just all types of sea birds, and just beautiful... it was beautiful. You get out here on the Yukon [LAUGH] Flats. It's a variety of country we're into. And then down south, some of the Baker jumps. We jumped one fire, it was like the Hamm's Beer ad, you know, we had a two-manner... right between the glacier, the five streams coming down, and the sun [INAUDIBLE] just beautiful country.

JH I'd say this is more of a jumper-philosophical interview than a hard-core there-I-was interview.

PS You know, I never... I never looked at the job as there-I-was. I mean, to me... to me it a... again, let's get into a creative firefighting, we should discuss that, too of... before we had this let-burn policy of giving the fire a chance sometime. And, you know, look at... it's just interesting, you just... one of the things that I was thinking about is all of the things you learn, I mean, how many different things you can do as a jumper. That's been fun up here, too. One reason I've stayed up here, I've worked paracargo... we've a pretty intense para-cargo program, I've been ENT... I am ENT. We have fire line explosives, you know, we get over roth and the rig. And there all into gardening... we have this garden here. And we have all these things you can do and learn. It's amazing, you get a lot of skills. Amazing new skills, everybody. That's something else that's not considered, I know. It's really an attitude coming from the administration that's there's so many guys who want this job that the hell with it, you know, the hell with these guys.
Everyone of those guys have stayed around for the past five years. They have a lot of money invested in us... a lot of time. And I know from the prospects like there could be a dozen men.... But if your in the job... if you have a guy with one or two years experience, or a guy ten years experience you... you got that trust and the trust there, the guy's got to earn that trust. And if it's not some bullshit, if it's a true trust. You start trusting the guy and know you can depend on him when your ass is in a jam. And on some of these bases where they're filled up with guys who don't stay over two or three years or eighteen months... Hey, the Marine Corps' like that, Hell. I mean, shit, when I was there and seventeen years old, and sure they teach you combat training and and charge... and charge that machine gun, you know, sure there's gonna be a couple of eighteen year olds blown away, what the hell. You got the machine gun nest and some colonel back there got a Silver Star for taking the machine gun nest. [LAUGH] That's great thinking if it works, but not so much fun working with that system.

JH Do you think the land make the jumpers? You know, the "Myth of the West," so to speak.

PS Yeah, I do. In fact, I was picking up some English courses so I could get an English minor and I took a correspondence course here at the University of Alaska, there's an Alaskan class. She developed it... you know, Jack London [INAUDIBLE] and all the stories. You can really see what came out of that one. The whole Western Myth came right to Alaska. It really did. Different words. The Western cowboy and frontiersman came up to be the trapper, and the explorer, and the homesteader in Alaska. And there's a small amount of that in the jumper organization. I don't think there's as much, because you have to wind up producing, you can't live on a myth. And if you live in the myth and the legend so long when you're out there and the mosquitoes start coming in on you and the smoke comes in and you got to get your ass out there and work. You got to put out, you got to be in shape, and you got to be effective. You can't be making the wrong calls too often, or you'll be in trouble. You got to be... when you're running that chain saw, you got to be as careful as hell; how you're cutting, you got to be careful of the guy who's swamping for you, your buddy when he's cutting. So it's... I think... I think... I really feel it's more reality in the jumping, just because you're out there. It's like getting into a boxing ring, or getting into a football game, you can't lie. There's no line out there. There's somewhat of a line when you're out there, it's just... everybody kind of catches in the person's weak points. There's a lot of group activity that way. If a guy, kind of move him around, if a guy isn't moving around he leaves. I love that social interaction, I really do. And I find it real, how do you put it, makes it exciting. If the job was just objective, banging on fire and coming back here, and just packing chutes, and it would be kind of boring after a while. But this intense social interactivity that goes on is fun. It's really exciting to me [INAUDIBLE]. Maybe when you verbalize it... some people verbalize it better, but everybody's
doing it, everybody's into it... it's fun. You can develop a sense of humor, a lot of patience, and a lot of good things. I really... I just have a lot of... the best part I said about... is no other experience or job is this unique. It's a remarkable area that... put in the years with the government until retirement.

JH Is that uniqueness there, you think, in 1959?

PS Yep, I noticed it... definitely. I've felt it right across the board. And... because no matter who... like, I can say, I don't want to... it doesn't matter mentioning names...

[END OF INTERVIEW]