Ken Taylor interviewed by Kim Maynard on 8 June 1984 for the Smokejumper Oral History Project. OH #133-106.

KT OK. Ken Taylor, '62 through 1966. At that time there were seventeen rookies in our particular class.

KM What was... tell me about your rookie class.

KT Uh... the largest group, at that time, that had ever gone through. That was one of the reasons that I think I got on... [I was] going to Washington State at the time and [it] put me through school. I was able to make enough money at that time, and, I believe, our first year I made $1,100 which was enough to go to school at that time. Which has changed dramatically, also the pay scale has changed.

KM Yeah. You made $1,100 in '62?

KT Yeah. Yeah, it was a good... a good fire year. The public doesn't like to hear it that way.

KM Right. [LAUGH]

KT A good fire year. Part of my summer was in LaGrande, Oregon, which was the satellite base at that time, which was a lot... a lot of fun. We enjoyed that. It was on a rotation base. We were on two week[s], and then they would send a new crew and rotate through. That was prior to Redmond. There was a satellite part time out of Redmond, not very well established. We did fly out of Redmond once while I was there. And the second year then, I was involved out of the Pasate (?) Wilderness, early project work repairing phone lines at that time. They took three of us in and built phone lines in from the old CCC [Civilian Conservation Corps] airport out of Pasate. I don't know if they can talk about that over there, which is in the wilderness and they can't... are not supposed to a fly in there, anymore.

KM What happened on your... do you remember your first jump... first practice jump?

KT I don't. I... I remember that I don't remember, I guess, more than anything. Because I was so aware of all of the things that you had to do, that I really did not recognize [INTERRUPTION] you know, floating in the air. The second one, I think I was much more aware of, because I know I was twisted and realized at that time that you could get hurt if things didn't go right. And... yeah, more of a remembering of it, really, than the first one. First fire jump I remember very well.

KM Well, how about your first fire jump.

KT Jumped with Ray Casey and we were on what they call Windy Peak down in Oregon. Wind blowing, seemed like 400 miles an hour, and we jumped on the, of course, the upwind side and it carried us across the... across the ridge. And coming down the
other side then, realized that we were really traveling fast and got caught in the...

KM You both got caught in this?

KT Yeah. And Ray just short of the top, I saw him disappear and he hung, and then when I went over the top of the ridge and then going downhill backwards, I could see this ground coming, and then all of a sudden I hung in a tree that allowed me to just pendulum around the tree and my toes just touched the ground so that I... it was one of those that a guy could have been hurt, but wasn't. But I remember that very vividly because it was the first jump, and also, I remember that I was turned around at first as to the orientation exactly where which direction where we were headed. Just because of the wind, I think, more than anything, to find out where I was. And we jumped at a fair elevation, because we were on the ridge itself. We were probably at a good 12,000 feet with the wind blowing and I would guess probably a good... almost half mile from the ridge just from the wind drift. But I do remember that very well.

KM Was Casey a rookie?

KT Uh, no. He had been jumping for some time. In fact, I think he'd jumped... I know he had jumped military prior to that and had jumped Forest Service, Military, and then was back. So he had [INAUDIBLE] A very good man to jump with, from a rookie's standpoint because he knew what was going on. And then, of course, my first pack out, which I remember very well. Which...

KM Which wasn't that fire?

KT No, it was the same fire. It was all downhill and it was short enough that we carried everything out with us. And then coming downhill, I remember... you know, the training you think you're in shape, but boy, not until the first fire do you realize that you're still not there. That... I think everybody finds out that you're just not there until then. I think as far as the funniest war story... funny to me, the other guys it wasn't so funny. We we jumping here on the west side of the Cascades, at Ross Lake and they had given us our 250 footers just in case. Four of us in the plane and they had given us the coordinates and there were two smokes just... not too far apart. We were first on the list, so we got to choose and so we took the one up on top, of course. By the time we hit the ground, there had been a logging crew that had seen the fire and they had already hiked in, but we hadn't seen them on the ground. And so we made it a mechanical show, they brought back chainsaws for us because there was a professional faller with them. And so there were two snags, they dropped... dropped the snags, we put that out. They came in and hauled us out with a helicopter. And again, of course, with the chainsaw our pack probably weighed close to 120 pounds. Real heavy thing, but we weren't carrying it. And they flew us into Darrington. The next morning the newspaper was there to do this interview and they had gone through the story
and had taken our pictures with these monsterous packs, of course. And then the other pair of fellows who were down in the hole, and one of the fellows had hung up. He was five hours, by the time he was able to retrieve that chute and get back out of his tree and hike... I think it was close to twenty-six miles, because it was right in the bottom, they couldn't get in to get them. There was no way to haul them out. And they were one day coming out... er, an overnight coming out. And, of course, the paper had to interview them also. Well, the next week or so we were back on this side, had jumped again, and when we got back, the same partner and I, all of the guys are standing out along the landing strip when they're bringing us in. Well, they never do that sort of thing. [LAUGHTER] So we knew something had to have been fouled up. Well, they received the article from the newspaper and they had this horrendous story from the other two fellows and this terrible pack and their fire, how bad it was, but they had our picture on it. [LAUGHTER] So here's these monsterous packs and these people thinking, unhuman people. But that was a... ohhh, that was a beauty. But the guys were waiting for us on that one.

KM I bet. [LAUGH]

KT We had a good jump off at Ross Lake, which was fun, too, 'cause we had to hike down to the lake. We got to come down on the Seattle tug... down to the dam and then stayed overnight and then they flew us out on boat-plane, which was new experience, too.

KM Great! When was that?

KT That would have been in '63 or four. I'm not sure which... which year it would have been. I was with Terry Cabe, I don't know if you would have interviewed Terry or not.

KM I tried to, I couldn't get a hold of him.

KT I'm not sure if he's still over there. But I was with him. That was another one of those kind of freaky in the way that we had jumped and there was such an updraft that we were forever getting on the ground. But it was stairs that we had to land on, these bluffs up here, but the updraft was such that you could pick a spot and you just touch in. Really a nice landing. And they dropped a streamer saying, you know, the chopper would be in the next morning to pick us up. It was a small enough fire. The fog was so thick the next morning you couldn't even see out. So we hiked down to the lake then. It was the first time we were ever really lost. It was downhill, but we came out on completely the other side of the ridge from where we thought we were, 'cause you just could not see. And I was really amazed at how you could get lost up there. But we did... it was just downhill right to the lake. But that's when I got to fly out on a boat. So that was another good jump that we had. And then was hurt one year, my partner and I. Again, I don't know if you got to talk to Tom Thomas.
I don't know whether he's around over there or not. He and I jumped down in Oak Ridge, Oregon and got caught on the back side of a ridge on a down draft. And it was either the wind blown tree into the roots turning further downhill, which, of course, picked up the speed going the wrong way and I pulled an ankle over the the point I could see the bottom of my foot, you know, there it was. [LAUGH] But I hollered at Tom then, you know, I knew I was hurt and he had come down in some trees just up a ways and had twisted a knee. So there both of us were, you know, just...

Two-manner fire?

Two-manner. And then, as it turned out, of course there was a crew that was not very far away, as we felt that they never really needed us in the first place. But then, of course, we didn't have streamers out, so they circled enough that finally they kicked the other two out. And we were able to holler at them, telling them to hit the trees, 'cause there was such a turmoil on the back side that just slammed us into the ground. The worst hit that we'd ever had. Then he was able to, more or less, crutch his way out; they did send a stretcher in for me. Demerolled me and hauled me out. I really don't remember coming out at all. We spent our night in the hospital.

What'd you have? Busted?

Yeah. Broken bones in the foot, and then a real severe twist. It broke the metatarsal across and then just rolled it around. Of course, they were gonna cut my boot off, "Man, no way! Not my new Whites." [LAUGH] I wasn't gonna let them do that. But I was able to get in and then they flew us out in a Cessna 310 that time... good rides, yeah. But that fall when in college, of course, in crutches and trying to play volley ball it was not good. And then the next year our first jump, it was real windy again and I was quite leary of the jump. In fact, we were the only ones that went that day because it was blowing so hard that they decided to quit. I'm glad that I did, because it... you know, I realized I could make it then, you know, survived it... I guess it would have been the next two years. So it must have been the fall of '63 when I broke it. And I have to tell one on Moody. He and I jumped. Nice little meadow and Bill missed and I had my camera and he was still hanging in the tree. Well, he was able to pull himself into the trunk far enough to completely unhook. And it would have been a drop of, oh, four or five feet probably. And he said: "Now wait, and I'll swing out on the harness and then you can catch a picture." Well, when he did, his glove wouldn't hang onto that nylon [LAUGH] harness and out he went and turned straight upside-down.

Oh no.
KT  Came down right on his shoulders and on his head and, you know, it hurt him, you know, it was... sensitive if you got out. And then I didn't get the picture, which was the worst part of the whole deal. But that was another one that... you know, the fire wasn't bad I think you tend to remember more of your, you know, the jumps and the in-betweens really than the fire. What was the one in Oregon? Gilkerson Creek, or something like that, which was a project fire we jumped, I think, three times.

KM   Oh, yeah? The same one?

KT   Yeah, and it was arson as it turned out. They managed to see the pattern, and found... in fact, they finally caught the fella that was setting them

KM    Just setting them for the...?

KT    Yeah, he was using cigarettes and then he would take the grass and just push it over, and the fire people found those. They were... I think they found two of them and that's how they determined that. And how they knew what they were looking for, you know... and they showed us one of them and you could just see, you know, but you'd had to know what you were looking for. It was an interesting one. And my brother and I jumped one just out of Twisp [Washington] one year. We were probably fifteen minutes to the fire. The fire was so small, it burned on the underside of a log, we cut the two ends off the log, turned it over, put it out with our canteens. Which was a half an hour at the most, and then sat on the road for seven hours [LAUGH] waiting for a rig to pick us up. We thought for sure that would be a three jump day for us.

KM    No way.

KT    It didn't work. It didn't work. But those were the, you know, the ones I could remember hopping in. Just a super bunch of people to work around. Come from all walks. We had a kid that jumped into the fire that year, which, I don't know what the official investigation said, but we felt that, you know he went into the fire. What had happened is he had gone in. The fire had burned through the area already... had gone through on the ground and he landed in a hot enough spot that his boots got real hot, so he took them off to cool his feet real quick, and then she came through back on top. And then he had to run, and didn't have his shoes on, and so he really, you know, burned his feet bad getting out of there. But he didn't have much choice from the, you know, the way it sounded. That was the only other incident where somebody got hurt, probably more from miscalculation. But his partner, I don't believe, was even close to it. Yeah, so I don't know what happened. And I don't know if that was his first or second year. He was in our rookie class, but I don't remember it was that year. That would have been the Fall Mountain Burn, I don't think they talk about it over there. Big burn. And, I don't know, that's sort of as far as war stories.
KM Did you do any rescue jumps?

KT I didn't. I wasn't involved on any of those. I did some glory jumps. The big picture that hangs on the wall in the office... the Twin Beech and the guys directing it right across, I was one those. And I don't know if they've ever determined for sure who that is.

KM Who's chute it is and what-not?

KT Yeah... yeah. But I did get to... the luck of the draw, it was one of those put-your-name-in-the-hat [INAUDIBLE]

KM They just had a photographer come up and...?

KT Yeah. He was from New York... Life, Look, one of the bigger magazines and was out doing a feature on that and that's, again, Silver Star up there, that's the mountain. Yeah, that was just glory time. And then another fun one that we had, at that time, was jumping out of the DC-3, which... all of ours were Twin Beech, you never made a stand-up exit, you know, that was really a new experience. And then another one was an Arrow Commander in which you sat with both legs hanging out and you scooted out the door. And then that engine is just right there, you'd swear you could touch it, but, you know, you can try and the wind, of course, would blow you right out of there.

KM Well, the Beeches, then, what'd you do? You did an exit standing in the door?

KT Two man... yeah... two man stick. You sat one foot on the step and then the other one was in behind you. It was a... like this. [DEMONSTRATES] That's how you were.

KM So you were sitting.

KT Yeah, sitting down. And then the guy behind you, of course, was standing in that crouch, you know, in the door, and then they would just slide into that sit position.

KM Did you ever do the exits just standing outside of the plane itself on the step?

KT Never did. Huh-uh.

KM I guess that was the Ford Trimotor.

KT Might have been the first ones. Yeah, I remember we experimented a little bit with changing speed on the airplane, from between 90 and 110. Trying to work on... at that time the twists were a problem. We were trying to figure out what was causing them. Sometimes the deployment bag would, as you would exit, and those lines were coming out, you'd see the deployment bag whip, so we don't know if it was ever speed, or just what it was it was. [INAUDIBLE] [I] remember that particular thing, and
it turned out that we were flying, I think, right at 100, it seemed to me.

KM You were in the beginning of the D-bags, then.

KT Uh, yeah. In fact, we would have been... oh, probably second or third year, because they had us jump without them once or twice just to let us know what it was like. [LAUGH] But you really become aware of your position when you don't have the deployment bag, because the little chute's out before the lines are out. And boy, if you're not standing straight up and down, it'll straighten you out. But it would really snap. I know a lot of the guys had the old Capewells hit them on the side of the helmet. Yeah, we did get to jump without them.

KM Did you have line-overs and that kind of trouble, even after the D-bags?

KT Yeah, I jumped with Terry Cabe on one, and he jumped behind me... second stick and he had a direct Mae West, I mean, it was right over the top and he went by me just sailing. And I hollered at him to throw the reserve. And he had jumped enough and I would have been first or second year, but he didn't seem to think it was too bad. He worked it and popped it off of there finally.

KM Cut it? Or...?

KT No. He ended up just sawing it off of there, just working lines and pulling air, enough to collapse here to where she pulled out. It... oh, it was something to watch. And then, too, we were still jumping twenty-eight footers or thirty-two foot chutes so that you could choose at that time. If the wind was blowing, or if you knew the weather was bad, you'd take the little one, so you could cut the air and you dropped a lot faster, of course, but you could fight the wind. And I jumped twenty-eights a lot, even though I was heavier. In fact there was one time I jumped second stick and beat my partner to the ground and took a picture before he hit. It was just enough difference. But he was quite a bit lighter. But that was another change that was coming at that time. I can't even think of the name of the chutes. 8... 5... T-5?

KM FS-5A?

KT FS-5A! FS-5As, yeah. Just a straight slot. Not real maneuverable, but better than what they had had. It did have the skirts.

KM Did they have the toggles or anything...?

KT Yeah... yeah. They still had the guide... guide cords. And they just shut her down the same... manipulate the same. Now are they doing anything with parabolics? Are they...?
KM We're... yeah. That's what we have now, flat canopies now.

KT Oh, yeah. It seems like they're always so far behind. [LAUGH] You know, it really seemed odd that, you know, the sport chutes at that time were so much different, so many more modifications. They didn't have the parabolic yet, but it... so much more air and maneuverability and...

KM Yeah. Ours is considered flat-round. They've called it a FS-12.

KT Now is it... what, fairly new? Last...?

KM Yeah. It's... um, I guess '80, something like that.

KT Those are the things that, you know, I think... and I don't know what the life of a smokejumper is going to be. Like I say, I don't know what the helitac is gonna do... you know, how long... how long we're gonna be around. [LAUGH] But if they keep making the changes and keep efficient, you know, I don't know why....

KM Yeah.

KT Yeah. And it's fun. I guess that's... you know, there's a certain amount of glory to it. Not everybody gets to do it.

KM How'd you get into it?

KT More from living in Okanogan [Washington], I guess. And then there were a couple of kids ahead of me, Tom Monroe, who lived in Seattle, was just one of the local fellows that jumped. And I had been a football, basketball, you know, kind of a jock and I kind of looked at that, you know, as... I idolized both to a certain degree. I was three... four years behind them and wanted to try it. And then I had worked with the D.N.R. [Division of Natural Resources], so I got my firefighting experience in. And then the following summer I'd worked on a ranch and had worked with the Indian agency on firefighting, so I was able to have enough background that way. And... plus a big rookie crew and then went over for a personal interviews.

KM So, did you know Lufkin previous to jumping?

KT I didn't. My Dad did, and I think that helped, too. One of those who-you-know things. My Dad worked for the county sheriff's office and he knew Francis, and I think that was, you know, a help.

KM And they gave you an interview.

KT Uh, more or less. I'd sent in the application and then had gone over during their winter months while they were repairing chutes and talked to Francis, and let him know that I really wanted it. I was really excited when I found out. I thought
that was great. But that's, you know, I guess, just living close
to it was more why I got... and wanted it. I did enjoy it. And
then I was athletic and I always liked that part of it
[INAUDIBLE]

KM What was your best year?

KT Boy, that's a toughie. '62... '63, probably. If I remember
correctly, I made more and ended up with... oh gosh, it would
have been fifteen jumps, or something like that. I think I ended
up with fifty six in five years. And... when was it? I had
almost half of those one year. With the glory jumps in there,
too. It seemed like '63 was the year that was the good one as
far as number of jumps. And then it would have been the same
year we jumped the DC-3 [INAUDIBLE] so that we got a variety that
way. They had an old Twin Beech out at LaGrande that they called
a "jumper-dumper." A fun old plane to ride in, it was set up the
same. Guy bailing you out with a foot behind you, you know.
[INAUDIBLE] But Oregon was different, too. You didn't live at
the barracks, you stayed all day at the airport and then they
were living at a hotel at that time. So really a different life,
yeah.

KM Great. Did you do project work down there?

KT Didn't. That was... odds and ends we'd get out, but most of
the time... it was such a small crew that we pretty much stayed
right at the airport. A lot of poker, you know, and basketball,
and, you know, just... we did our PT [physical training] there.

KM Just waiting for fires?

KT We did... yeah, that's really what it was, just a long, long
wait.

KM Did you get many?

KT Yeah, the one year it would have been, again, I think '6-...
it would have been '63 that we were fairly busy. So that... again,
we ended up with some glory jumps down there, which is
always fun. They tried, I think, at that time, that you were
looking at least every two weeks that you would jump. No matter
whether there was a fire or not, they'd take you out.

KM Oh, they did? Great!

KT Yeah. And then I started rigging, I think it would have
been in '63 also... my second year, they started me and then I
think '63... it was '64 then, that I did quite a bit of rigging.

KM Did you ever spot?

KT Yeah. Yeah, I got into squad leader training, it would have
also have been... well, probably '64 I would have been into that
training aspect.
KM Any... any spot stories?

KT Well, I really don't, 'cause I was just in the training part of it and just spotted for the practice jumps. Didn't do any fire spotting at all. I was still too much of a jump crew member at that time. I never doubted the spotters, you know. When they said to go, you went. And never had any complaints, you know, all the guys that spotted for me, I felt did the job.

KM And in every fire you went on, everyone else seemed to do OK, too? No major injuries or...?

KT No. No. We were never involved in any... anything that I was close to where there was a serious injury. The fellow that was burned... I was in Oregon then and he was up here, so I wasn't even close to that one. So that there weren't any serious injuries. Guys get dinged, like they do, but nothing major. I was the only one I can think of that they had to haul out.

KM Really? That's good.

KT My brother, during his rookie year... I can't even think of the name of the roll now.

KM Allan?

KT It wasn't the allan. They had some fellow that had been there before that always just hit--crashed forward just... I guess they had a name... the fellow's name that... I remember my brother doing that, dinged an ankle. Turned out on the sewing machine. A lot of times does.

KM Yeah, I guess. [LAUGH] I hear there's a... I don't know how many... very few, if any, days where people... they had to be out of work because of injuries. They have a great record.

KT No. I think that the injury release time is awfully small. The whole time I was there, the one fellow that was burned the one year, and Tom and I dinged up... and that was right at the end of the season, which, I guess, it would have been for us anyway. But it was late in August when that happened, so... yeah, downtime for injuries was very minimal. The safety record I thought was really fantastic.

KM I heard that a lot, just because Lufkin runs a pretty good ship.

KT Yeah. Yeah, he and Bill both. They're very strong physical fitness and aware. They're always teaching, you know, you keep lookin out for, you know, those danger spots. And reading fires, they assume that you've had quite a bit of fire training, but they still push that. And at that time, the squad leaders that were there were really a good bunch. They'd been there a while and... Dick Wild man... I don't know...
KM Never came across him.

KT Yeah. I don't know where he is. But a lot of those guys were just super squad leaders. They had been there long enough to really know some of the bad spots which we get into. And that really helps. And that really helps.

KM Yeah, I bet. Good spotting. [LAUGH]

KT Yeah... yeah. And they wouldn't... they'd look over the area pretty close. I can't think of any that we didn't jump because of the conditions. There might have been some that we shouldn't have, but the spotters, again, picked out big enough areas and would watch the winds very close to see how much drifting you had. The one on Ross up here, the wind with the updraft, there wasn't any because there wasn't any place, really to land. There were just these little stair steps on the... on the hill, but there wasn't anything happening, so, you know, we jumped and there was no... no problem. But had the wind been blowing I don't think they would have. It was one of those things that worked out for us.

KM Yeah. Ever tree-up in a 250 footer?

KT Never got that high. Eighty was as high as I... which was in a hemlock.

KM This country?

KT No, this was down in Oregon. And the scary part of it was, once I got down, we just walked out to the end of the let-down rope and pulled. Snapped the top out of the tree. I knew what kind of a tree I was in and I had gone down pretty careful. Again, my rookie year and just a matter of chute manipulation wasn't, you know, wasn't there yet, and hung up. You know, that's where it was. And that happens... that happens.

KM What was you... when you were up here, what was your project work like?

KT Worked out of Twisp most of the time, and mine was involved with trail construction part time and timber marking, just like logging. Did a lot of that. And, again, it was one of those odd things, because we did a lot of timber marking. We went through just what you were gonna do, and then they sent us all to a school, it must have been the next year and none of us passed it. After we had did the marking already for a year, so we still feel they're figures were not accurate because so many of us missed it by the same margin. Really. We felt they were in error. Now they may not have been, but [LAUGH] at that time we did.

KM So no more timber marking.

KT No. We didn't. Trail construction pretty much after that.
But that led me to a job over here later with helitac, which, of course, was a competitor at that time.

KM  Right. So you went from jumping to helitac?

KT  Yeah. Yeah, just because I had moved over here. Of course jumping wasn't available. But they... I talked to the people at Forest Service and I was in education and working with what is called Sheltered Workshop, which is the... not a real severe mentally retarded, but enough that you had to keep a pretty close watch on them. And ended up in some big fires over here and then I was ended up on those, just from past experience. And so I ended up on helitac for the next two years.

KM  Did you ever do any sector boss or any kind of... other things than just to...?

KT  Not while I was jumping. I did over here, again, from that background, ended up... in fact, working one side of a major over here and we got chewed out royally for cutting some of their trees down. The fire had jumped the three nights before with their one foot lines, but these trees are so bad over here. But it's really like... it's really thick. And so finally I told them, I said, "Hey, we'll stop her." And so we did. We... well, we cut a swath out, and apparently they never experienced that over here as much. They just don't have that kind of fire, and they thought we cut too many of the trees down, even though we had stopped it, so.... But that was the only time I really got involved in the sector-type work. But never while I was jumping. That was one of those that led into that afterwards.

KM  How long were you helitacing afterwards?

KT  It would have been... '67 I was at summer school, so it would have been '68, '69, and '70 that I was involved.

KM  But you were around for the...?

KT  Yeah, eight years that I worked summers with the Forest Service.

KM  And you were around in '70 for the big bust?

KT  Yeah... yeah.

KM  Any stories out of that one?

KT  Not really. I kept track here, because I was with helitac and, you know, just kind of following where the jumpers were going, you know, keep track. In fact, I ordered two different times. I told them they better get on it because I knew it that it was gonna be a while before we could ever get there. And then finding spots to put in and knowing the area and so there were two different spots. Plus they went out the Olympic Peninsula once, which is just too far for us to go. And so... yeah, we had
some things happening over here. They called for jumpers and then was in on one fire where we did come in to relieve the jumpers, which was kind of fun to kick around stories. It was fun.

KM Yeah, I bet. Well, what did you like best about jumping?
KT Well, I... stingily, I guess, I enjoyed the glory part of it. Probably more the first two years as a rookie I think you tend to be more that way. And just the personal satisfaction of jumping. You know, fighting fire is not fun. It's hard work. It's satisfying to know that you've whipped it, and that kind of thing. But the jumping itself, I think, was fun. I guess that's... I'd have to say it's fun, the flight. [LAUGH] And there were different times, if things weren't bad, they'd sneak you up another three or four hundred feet. And one time we were... we had to be at the minimum, because we were open and hit. [LAUGH]

KM On purpose?
KT Yeah, the wind was bad again and they just wanted us to get down. I'm sure we were up... you know, we opened with no problem and we weren't in the air very long. We went out and we were there.

KM Do you ever have any excitement with the fire itself?
KT Yeah. One where we really could have been in a bad situation. We ended up on the right side of the canyon. I jumped down the Snake Canyon and... it would have been, probably '63, and we were trying to head the fire off down the bottom. Trying to stop it from crossing the canyon. It was a lot of cheat grass and real dry... it would have been, probably later July, August. So it was ready to go. And we lost. We just couldn't get down the canyon fast enough and it did get across and...

KM You were building that line downhill?
KT Yeah. We were trying to go downhill and just head it off from jumping and getting across the canyon. Of course, then we knew we'd be way at the top again fighting that thing. And we realized that once it crossed there was no way we were gonna get to it. And we estimated that the fire itself was traveling over sixty miles an hour. It just shot up through there. Had we been down in there trying to beat that thing, it would have run over us. And then one other fire after it was over... it wouldn't have been a jump fire, though, which was so hot that there were some cattle down in a little bit of a draw, and there wasn't a singed hair on them, but figured it was so hot that it just took the oxygen and they just suffocated. So that a guy can get in some situations where... it's all over.

KM Yeah, pretty quick.
KT Yeah, but never into... into a real dangerous situation from
out standpoint. I think when a person's out there fighting it...

KM ... doesn't seem as dangerous. [LAUGH]

KT Yeah... yeah. I don't think it does, and I'm not sure that it is. These guys that drive at the Indianapolis cars at 200 mile an hour I think are crazy, too. But they do that and they're familiar with what's going on. And so to... to the firefighter I don't think it's as dangerous as it seems, maybe, to the public that aren't out there. And the training that they put you through, you know, they want people out there that can think and stay out of trouble more than anything.

KM Do you see jumpers as unique?

KT Oh, yeah, I do. I think they are more... probably athletic than the average, for one. I think they have to be to survive the training, for one. I don't know, but if a person was to run an I.Q., I think they would find them higher than the average, again. So I do, I think they're very unique in physical and mental aspects. Not from a bragging point of view, but I think if a person would ever run that study, that that's what you would find. I don't know what percentage anymore are college bound or have advanced schooling, but I would guess a fair percentage are that way. I don't know what your Missoula count is, I know ours was high. You know, for...

KM ... school. Yeah, I would imagine it's pretty high.

KT So I think a person would find that they're... they're different. And it's fun looking back at the rookie year, because it is so exciting. It's fun. And then after you've been there a while to sit back and watch the rookie crews come through. You can see those things you did, that aren't nearly as exciting anymore... those little things. It's fun, I really enjoyed it. But, yeah, they are a unique group. And, again, a small group, really, when you consider the population, you know, even the population of firefighters, you know, a small percentage. And I think that's another thing that makes them unique, that number if you wanted to be very small crew. I don't know what it's runs anymore. They were, I think, twenty at that time. And in Missoula...

KM About twenty. It was about twenty when you jumped?

KT Yeah. Yeah, we had seventeen... well, we would have had thirty because we had eight in Oregon and I think that was one of the reasons that the rookie crew was so high, because we were filling that satellite base. But still thirty, which is a pretty small group.

KM Do you feel like you've learned specific things from jumping... gained skills?

KT Yeah. I think from my, because I'm science background
anyway, but practical application of physics. I... I don't really know how to put that, just you can see how some of the laws of science apply. You jump on different days and you begin to read what that weather... the humidity, what a difference it's going to make in that flight and the wind and you learn to watch the fire on the ground. A lot of those kinds of things, just the physical sciences that you hear about and now you can actually see them in progress. Yeah, I think so. Things that you don't think of at the time, but you put into use really not realizing that you're doing that.

KM Yeah, right.

KT That's... yeah, you learn, no doubt about that. And every time is different. You jump out of the plane and you land on the ground, but each time the conditions are different. Flight itself, I guess, is not different other than facing the wind and those kinds of things. Where you land and what it's [INAUDIBLE] Yeah.

KM Yeah. Did you see much quartering back then? Was that kind of a... you didn't do that with those chutes?

KT No. The guys who were talking about before, you know, grabbing a lot and dumping air so that the could fall quicker. That was one thing that they didn't really recommend, that had they been done. But the chutes were not manipulative enough that they were... little things like that you would do once and a while just to...

KM ... get down quicker.

KT Yeah... yeah. Yeah, you could see, you know, the ground... where that ground it going, how fast is was going by, what you wanted to do. Yeah.

KM Yeah. You... there was no danger of spilling all your air.

KT No. You could always turn it loose. You wouldn't want to do it real close to the ground. A guy wasn't brave enough to pull a streamer, it would....

KM Right. [LAUGH]

KT But... yeah. But there were things, you know, like we said, where the chutes have changed in their manipulating characteristics that guys probably did different. I know hearing some of the fellows riding some of the hotter chutes to hold a 360 where it will pendulum. Having pulled a 360, is like an anchor, it's still straight down. It's almost sixty, no not quite that... must have been about thirty seconds to make a 360. So they're really slow compared to today. And so when those chutes were coming out, you know, the guys were talking, "Man, you can't hold a 360," because they weren't use to that. You know, "What's it gonna do to me?" So as you... where you were
jumping a particular chute, there's no way I could jump that chute today. I'd hurt myself. [LAUGH] I wouldn't be use to just the handling characteristics of it. So those kind of changes are good because they help you put, I'm sure you can pick your spot and zero in. And the guys that jumped those could too, but it was a lot slower. I don't know if the skill level... I would personally say that the skill level today is higher than it was then, just because you're riding with something that... if you're driving a sports car now, where we weren't. And I... I think the skill level is, no doubt, higher.

KM What kind of training did they do for you to learn how to chute handle?

KT Hanging in the tower, and that's really it. You didn't...

KM You'd hang in the tower and they told you, "OK, you're coming up on landing and what are you gonna do? Winds blowing from your back."

KT Yeah, the only... what we did, he had the shock tower and I don't know, I suppose they still do that. We didn't even have the... I don't even know what they call it, the one where you ride the cable down. See, now we didn't have that either, we had a shock... can we help you?

[VOICE] Looking for Willard.

KT Oh, he's been drifting around here. I don't know which way he went. They had just a straight drop shock tower. Didn't have the...

KM Didn't have the end... when you got to the end you "tschhh."

KT Uh, they put you in the capewell things. Yeah, right, they were just a big rope and started you out, of course, with a very short drop, and then you went to the bigger one. But no fan system, no... real small door. Did the mock-up then out of the plane. But as far as the first ride, there was no indication... you hung in your capewells and they would tell you from the ground, you know, grab the right or the left, while you're hanging on the the cable. But they're both stationary.

KM [INAUDIBLE]

KT No, you weren't even up very high. And that was the same one they practiced the let-downs from. And so the first ride you were, you know, there was the little green lines... look up to see that everything's open. But they've done so much of that, that you do that, I think, automatically, you know, down to what's rote; which is what it would have to be. But the first ride was the first time that you were really aware of what that chute could do. And they did drop us in a nice, big, open meadow. You couldn't miss and it was... oh, gosh, probably the
fifth or so jump before they made timber... timber drop.

[END OF SIDE A]

[BEGN SIDE B]

KT ...and looked at their set-up where they did have the cables. I'm not sure if they even had a fan down there.

KM Fan?

KT Yeah, with the idea of standing in the door and you got this wind blowing.

KM Oh, really? Prop blast? [LAUGH]

KT Yeah... yeah... yeah. It was one of the things they were playing with at the time, you know. You exit and turn and... so things changed that way quite a bit, too.

KM It's a great idea.

KT And they had one... one chute. They had it on a great big hoop that they hung you in to familiarize yourself with where the lines are. But it didn't do anything, it was just a stationary and you hung there. "Right turn." "Left turn," you know, they just called. That was it.

KM Yeah. How about a landing? Just jumping of the...?

KT Yeah, just jumping off the ramps, through the obstacle course, and then they experimented, which did not work at all. They were very slow, standing on the tailgate of a pickup and just moving and then you would just jump off of that. But the momentum of the pickup was so different than coming in on that chute, because you had something to hang onto. Were you were coming off the pickup, and boy, guys were just SPLAT! you know, because they couldn't roll quick enough, and so that... it just didn't work. They toyed with that a little bit, but it... so the landings were off the ramps. And I would assume not much different today, are they? Well, unless you ride the cable, I guess you can land.

KM Yeah, we have a landing simulator machine that drops you down... drops you down at an angle.

KT Oh, is that right? See, now that's all together new, too.

KM Modern day equipment.

KT And I don't know if your... what's your decent? Do you have any idea what...?

KM How fast?
KT Yeah.

KM God, I should know that. Fourteen feet a minute... second.

KT Let's see, fourteen... yeah...

KM I forget if it's fourteen miles a minute... something.

KT Yeah, I couldn't tell you either.

KM Of course, it's not the same for me as it is for everybody else.

KT Yeah, right. Well, that's... yeah, again, even the simulator, like I say, are approximate. Every landing is gonna be that... a little bit different, anyway. So I know those first times landing when you finally get that ground rush that you start working on getting ready to land. Which is something I think you change, too, the more you jump, because you tend to ride it longer, I think, the more you jump. On our rookie training it was so many feet off the ground you take your landing position. And as we jumped more, you would ride that thing much longer get it right down to where you wanted it. And, again, I think that's good training, because then they don't get somebody hurt. You know, "This is what you do," and then you learn that later, rather than never telling you about it.

KM Do you ever do practice jumping and come real close to the panel?

KT Once, and then I was beat. I think I was within ten feet and somebody else had zeroed in on it. But the wind was right that day and the conditions were good. Yeah, was... that's fun, you know, shooting for the target. And you do that, I guess, jumping, too when you're out. We jumped in on a herd of elk one time, which is fun. They could... they were in a meadow we wanted to jump in and as we got closer to the ground, started hollering at them, and, of course, coming in from above, and they didn't know where we were and they were looking all over. And I remember a shadow or something crossed the meadow then. Boy, they were long gone and after that we got going. If we hadn't said anything and being smart come in there and hang up on one of those things. A guy could get hurt.

KM [LAUGH] Yeah, really.

KT But that was down in Oregon, too. Yeah, you see game and things like that which are kind of fun, too, that you don't see everyday.

KM Did you ever have any episodes with bears or snakes?

KT Never did. Don't recall even having one in camp, as far as the fire's are concerned. We got run off a ridge one time in lightning. We had jumped right behind a storm, and then it had
circled and came back through. And it was flash and bang at the same time, it was that close to us. And we were up too high, or we felt we were at least, and moved down. Things like, that, again, I think a person learns that it's more likely to strike up on top than it is in a hole. Not that it can't but... reduce you chances, anyway.

KM As long as it doesn't start a fire below you.

KT That's... yeah... yeah. But we did move one time on that.

KM OK. You ever have any problems with the plane itself? Like, did you do any exits that weren't planned?

KT No. No, never did. We... the pilot... I don't know, did you talk to any pilots, Ken Cabin?

KM No, I haven't talked to him.

KT Oh, he would... we'd fly patrol flights, and in the Twin Beech the choice seat is right in the door of the cargo bay, which is right by the door and you can see out. It's a really nice spot to sit. Well, he would fly along, and you weren't aware that he was living the tail all the time. Very, very gradual so that he was flying just a little bit nose down, not descending but just had lifted the tail and then about that time, he would cut the engine and drop the tail out from under you. Well, shoot, probably you thought you were going in. [LAUGHTER] You know, that was always a thriller. As far as anything really serious, no, we never... never did. They had lost a plane in '58 over there with the jumpers, which I understand...

KM Killed... crashed?

KT Yeah. Which was on the minds of a lot of people, and the pilot, too.

KM That was those squad leaders, I guess.

KT Yeah, and one jumper, I think it was. But that was a spot that a lot of guys were still very aware of. And I think it made people very aware of what could happen, and so it was something they watched all the time. We did fly in... it wasn't a jump flight, but had gone into the old CCC airport up at... in Pasatin (?) which was one way in and one way out. You landed a little bit up hill. And they hit a soft spot. OK, hit a soft spot in the runway and it started to nose and he hit the throttles and the fellow that was riding co-pilot with him had flown too, and, of course, hit the wheels so that they could get their speed. And we had flown out a way that they had just never exited off that airport and managed to pick up enough speed to get out over the trees and then he dropped it down on the hole to get the air speed up that we needed to come back around again. And we were so low that there was no way to ever get out anyway. And nobody shifted in the plane, everybody just kind of sat there like [DEMONSTRATES] you know, and we were very aware that we were in
trouble, but I guess it was one of those situations that you get out of it or you don't. And fortunately we had enough power and the load was light enough that he was able to...

KM ...get enough.

KT But that was some... an unforeseen thing on the runway, they just hit that soft spot... just wet in the spring. And... but a lot of times the had to buzz deer off up there. They would come in the other way and so...

KM Oh, yeah?

KT But when we looked out, we could see the... when we dropped off the runway and came back around, we could see the tree up... they were up there and we were down in that canyon. That was... that was a thrill.

KM I bet. At that time, you had... what kind of... you had workman's comp. and you had all the things that are [INAUDIBLE] insurance...

KT Yeah. Yeah, we had the insurance, they gave us comp. time. I guess the only thing that... the way I'm feeling that it would be different is we were on straight time all the time. There wasn't... there was overtime, but it wasn't a difference in pay. It was just a straight, flat fee straight through.

KM Right, did you get per diem?

KM We did while we were in Oregon. I don't remember what it was. It was enough to... to survive on. $9.00 a day at that time, I think, is what it was. But that paid for our hotel and left us enough money then for our meals, which got old in a hurry. All of them are eaten out. There's only so many places in LaGrande to eat. [LAUGH] Yeah, we did have a pretty... but the pay scale was, I'm sure, different now. Is that different than it is now? Or how does it work?

KM I think it's the same GS-5 first year; GS-6 until you become a squad leader.

KT Yeah... yeah. That's the same thing.

KM They'll never change. What made you leave jumping?

KT Education. I was getting my teaching degree and needed to go back and pick up my fifth year. And it was tough, but it was one of those situations where I used up my time and I needed to go back to school. And so that's why I did. I missed it, I really did.

KM Yeah, I bet.

KT It was tough to give it up, it really was. And the
following Summer then, is when we were here. I taught one year, and then jumped the following Summer. And then the next Summer that's when I went back to school. That was the only reason I gave it up. I really mean that. It was fun.

KM Let's see... where you... you were permanent then, after a while?

KT No. No, I was still strictly summers because I in the school, going to Washington State at the time so that... yeah, it was strictly summer. I started early one year. We had taken a Spring semester from college and had traveled around the United States... there were two of us, and were back early that year, so they did put me on. I was always on a summer status.

KM Did you see a change in the kinds of people who started jumping since you started?

KT I don't think so. I was in the era when there were a lot of college kids... junior college, four year people, and pretty much those crews stayed about the same percentage. I would say there's probably more college kids than not at that time. I wouldn't say that there was too big of change. I think I was with the group that was the change. I think there were probably more of us. From looking at who was already there, probably more college kids at that time then there had been. I think that, but I didn't see the change. I would guess we was a part of it instead.

KM I wonder if it's still continuing?

KT I don't know, I haven't talked to Bill in a while. Use to keep track of him, and stopped whenever we'd go up there. I don't know what their turnover is. I know they changed their policy as to what their permanent staff is. Apparently more of a voluntary on the jump list thing, and I don't completely understand it. I'm not sure just what's involved in that. It sounds more like your on... you qualify each year and then you may be working uptown and then when you rotate onto the list and you're on call or... I'm not sure.

KM Oh, the beginning of the year?

KT Yeah, that type thing. And, again, I think that's government funding, you know, they're looking for ways to... cause they were gonna shut Winthrop down at one time, too. It caught enough support, fortunately, to hang on.

KM Apparently just a short while ago... a month ago, they got this big deal from some computer that says, "Hey, keep Winthrop. Let's build it up." So they're all... they're all happy now.

KT Oh, that'll be all right. Oh, yeah. Well, it's in a strategic spot, really, for the Northwest. If they moved it, they'd move it to Wenatchee, to me would be... to go... if they
wanted to go somewhere bigger, but really then they're just further away from where they want to be. Yeah, I hope they keep it. It would be a historical spot, which it could very well be, too. Frances and his crew started that thing.

KM Right. What did you think of Frances as a base manager... I guess they called him at that time?

KT Yeah. Pappy Lufkin, I guess, which is what his nickname was, and yeah, that's how you looked at him. I think he was very fair and... which I call fair treating everybody the same. You know, I think he was very fair that way. And if you screwed up, he let you know. And I don't think he felt it was a personal thing at all. He was looking out for his crew. And I thing that was one of the reasons they had, to me anyway, a pretty fair safety record, is because he did that. He did take care of the people and get after you if you were looking like a safety hazard. And he could tease, a very dry sense of humor, sometimes you weren't sure. [LAUGH] Yeah, an excellent manager. Very, very good.

KM I hear he was quite a scrounger of materials.

KT Oh, yeah. Yeah, if you needed it, it would show up. [LAUGH] Yeah... yeah.

KM That's pretty good. What else have I got here?

KT Yeah, well, I can't think of anything to tell you. I've been away from it that long, too. It's hard to put things back together.

KM Yeah, you need to be... a whole bunch of people telling stories, that's how you get them out.

KT Yeah... yeah. The memories come back.

KM Right. Did I ever ask if you did any water jumps?

KT I didn't. That came in after I had left. We were in the floatation padding, but we didn't do any of the water jumps. Yeah, that was a new experience for me, because I had gone back one Summer and there were a whole bunch of these wet chutes hanging, and I couldn't figure out what that was. And they said they had done their water jumps the day before, I think it was, and that was new then. They had recognized that fact that, especially in Alaska where that could happen very easily and they were working on it at the time and the suits would float, but they didn't drop us in the water, not at that time. I didn't... was that part of your training anymore?

KM Well, we jumped in a swimming pool. [LAUGH]

KT Well, yeah.
KM From the edge.

KT Oh, just.... oh, you didn't drop in.

KM No, we didn't drop into the... it would have been a tight spot. Can you recall anymore stories of other people? The old time after jumping, you're all hanging out and someone says, "Here I was...."

KT Yeah, boy, I... I tell you, I can't think of any off hand. I'm sure there are some, but [LAUGH] kind of a loss in that department.

KM Maybe we about covered it. How about anything you didn't like about jumping?

KT No. The only... ever complain I think I would ever would have been while we were in Oregon, the food got old, just from eating in... eating in restaurants. No, I really enjoyed the whole thing. I thought it was great. We would have jumped every day, had it been available to us, I'm sure. But I think their policy there helped where if there was a slow spell, that you would jump, just a practice jump just to...

KM When did they start that practice?

KT Oh, well, we were doing that... it would have been in '63. We jumped in Oregon because it had been slow for awhile, and then we did get into fires later. But it seemed like in '63 they were looking at that and it seemed like when I left, which would have been in '66, which was a slower summer, that we were, I think... what'd I jump? Six or seven times my last year, and I think four of the six were practice jumps. Yeah, it had really been a slow year.

KM How about, either a termination party or after a jump... a middle of the summer story?

KT Don't remember any of the... I remember the first night prior to jumping, which was a, I guess, a traditional thing there.

KM A new man's party?

KT Yeah, it wasn't really a party so much as the guys... the old-timers had been out on a party getting her organized, and then, of course, we were trying to sleep because tomorrow was jump day routine. And in the barracks at that time they had vertical siding in the hallways, and they would get home late and be charging up and down waking everybody up. And drag a guy or two out of their bunk and hose him down, and, I think as I look back on it now, and being involved later years, it was setup more to get your mind off of just being afraid what was gonna happen the next day. All that apprehension and it really broke that feeling, anyway.
KM It wasn't rookie harassment?

KT No. Not in a harmful sense at all. It was more... it was rookie harassment, but more for your own good. They weren't out giving you a bad time in a destructive way at all. It was really a... it broke that... here's something else all of a sudden to think about, and I look back on that as really a positive thing, although at the time we thought it was horrible. You know, that kind of a deal. And the termination parties were really... I would have to say under control. There were a lot of guys that had bad heads the next day. And those things, but... and then it was a matter of, "You get to go on the patrol flight, not me." But they were fun, and usually held early enough that everybody got to go and I'm sure that there were guys that, maybe, consumed more than they needed to at the time. But, again, it was a matter of what the fire conditions looked like, too. If it was wet, nobody cared, that kind of thing. Yeah, they were fun. I enjoyed those. A good good-bye party. Real nice. And I assume those are still part of it.

KM I assume so, been to... my first year we had a big bust the day of the party. A big fire, everyone jumped on it, so termination party on the fire.

KT Oh, wow!

KM Yeah. Well, I guess that's about it.

KT Well, that's fine. Like I say, I can't think of anything else that... to throw at you.

KM OK.

[END OF INTERVIEW]