Interview with Don Webb by Floyd Cowles on 21 July 1984 for the Smokejumper Oral History Project. OH #133-110.

FC Floyd Cowles interviewing Don Webb at the Aerial Fire Depot in Missoula, Montana on July 21, 1984 for the Smokejumper Oral History Project. Don, provide me an autobiography of yourself. Start out here.

DW Well, I was born in Decorah, Iowa December 16th, 1933. And was raised in Clear Lake, Iowa went through high school there. And participated in all the usual sports in high school. And went two years to a junior college in Mason City, Iowa. And I went to the University of Idaho at Moscow for one year in the forestry school. My forestry… er, Forest Service career started on blister rust camps in 1954 on the St. Joe National Forest. And I spent three summers doing that type of work, and working in blister rust, I was a compass... a compass man I think they called them in those days. And filling out the lanes for the crews to follow to do their job. It was while I was at the University of Idaho that Lavell Thompson, who at that time was the fire control officer on the Payette, came up to the University and he was going to interview prospective candidates for smokejumper's school in McCall. And it just happened one of my friends in the dorm was going down for one of these interviews and I really didn't even know what it was all about. I just tagged along with. Ironically, Lavell interviewed me as well as my friend and I got the job and my friend didn't. [laugh] So anyway, my first year in smokejumpers was at McCall in 1956. And between McCall, I jumped out of McCall, and Missoula, and Silver City until 1960... er, through the 1960 season. Following that, I took a job as a forest dispatcher on the Coronado National Forest in Tucson, Arizona. And then in 1967, I became a zone dispatcher at Albuquerque [New Mexico] and following that, I'm not sure just what the year was, I became a regional fire coordinator for Region Three, working out of the regional office in Albuquerque. And in 1973, I became the fire staff on the Gila [National Forest] and had that position until I retired this past January.

FC Sounds pretty good, Don. Let's start out with... well, you mentioned blister rust on the St. Joe in '54. Did you get on fires then?

DW Yes. We got on several fires. They trained, I guess, probably all the blister rust crews trained... to give us training. And we went on several, I'd say, class-B and -C type fires during '55 and '55 I... we went on two or three of the same size. And I got on one fairly large fire on the Clearwater. I can't remember the name of the fire now.

FC In '55?

DW Yeah.

FC I can't remember that one either. But it gave you somewhat
of a liking for fire?

DW Uh-huh.

FC It helped in training and so on?

DW It was a real break for me, you know, from my day to day monotony, somewhat, of blister rust. And we... I think all of us in the camp looked forward to the fire training sessions and hoping that we could go on fires.

FC OK. Your first year was in 1956?

DW Yes.

FC And can you get into the training you had and what you liked about training, what you didn't like, and I'm going beyond just the parachutings, and we'll, get into specific fires later on, where it was located, the type of facilities and so on.

DW OK. We had real... what I thought was very good training in McCall in 1956. They... some of the training that, I guess, impressed me the most was really the fire training. I had never, while I was in blister rust, I thought got... I had received good fire suppression training, but the smokejumper base gave us some really, what I thought was excellent fire suppression training. But of course, the way it started out, we had the usual physical training and then... one of the training aspects that I guess impressed me the most was they sent each squad of new trainees out in an isolated part of the forest and spent two weeks and during that time we didn't have any of the usual creature comforts when you go camping. You just had the necessities, bed rolls, and some food, and I don't believe we even had tents. And for that two weeks, why we did some project work... I'm not sure whether it was fence maintenance, or what it was. I think it was telephone... some telephone maintenance was what we were doing. During that time is when our trainers taught us how to climb trees, and how to fall snags properly, how to use the hand tools that we were suppose to know how to use, and I learned a lot during that two weeks. Also it, at least in my squad, it was kind of a period of weeding out some folks that thought they liked... were gonna like smokejumping, but didn't really like to be out in the woods for two weeks at time. So we lost a few people out of our squad during that time.

FC It wasn't because of physical ability?

DW No. They just...

FC Just because of their mental attitude?

DW Right. Anyway, when we got back from that, then our ground training started and it was probably as good in that... for that time of the day. Some of our methods were crude compared to today's method of training, but they had the usual things that
they still have. I'm sure they have the obstacle course, which I had a terrible time with coming fresh out of college and not being in the best physical condition. I remember that, and they had one... one aspect of the training, learning how to do rolls... the Allen roll that was pretty crude, and I think we had more injuries, thinking back on it, than we actually did in the jumping. They loaded us all up in the back of a pick-up and I remember facing forward and they'd drive the pick-up at a certain speed and when they honked the horn, we just jumped out and we had to do our Allen roll, depending on which way we were facing. And was quit a few injuries with that method, at least it did teach us how to attempt our Allen rolls.

FC  How fast were you going? A couple miles an hour?

DW  No. I can't really remember, but it seems like they got up to about twenty miles an hour.

FC  That's pretty fast.

DW  That's pretty fast, really, jumping just dead onto the ground. They, of course, worked that up to that. We started out slow and worked up to that. The jump tower, one of the things that really impressed me was when we got on top... onto the highest elevation on the jump tower, they put a rock in our right hand and when we jumped off the tower, we were suppose to pass the rock behind our back and end up with it in our left hand. I remember when... most of us when we first... made our first practice jump that way, the rocks... we lost the rocks [inaudible] After... after several times on the jump tower, pretty soon we got to where we could think while we were making that short drop through the air and we could pass the rock from our right hand to the left hand, and that was kind of impressive to me to learn something as simple as that. Let's see... of course, we had the let-down training, which was, I'm sure, pretty much as it is today. And on our first... well, during that year the fire season started pretty early and I think we got four or five practice jumps. I can remember on the first practice jump that we had... the first live jump we were gonna make out of an old Ford Trimotor, we all gathered at the airport at the prescribed time and it was all the new men that were starting out. Max Allen was one of our squad leaders, and Max was always kind of a joker type individual. He came out there to be one of the spotters, I guess.

FC  Was he the foreman there?

DW  No. Reid Jackson was the foreman at McCall. Well, Max came out and I remember him standing around, of course, all of us were kind of sober and wondering what was gonna take place on our first jump, whether we we'd have... whether we'd have the guts to go through with it and so forth. Anyway, we were all pretty quiet and waiting for things to get started on the ground there. Max walked out and he looked up and saw a seagull fly over. I remember him saying, "Boy, that's a bad omen. Seagull flying
over like this is a bad omen." And, of course, that didn't help our spirits any too much either. But anyway, we went on up and I think because of all the good training and the progressive training that they'd given us up to that point, there wasn't really any problem of going out of the airplane. We were ready for it by that time, even though, I'm sure, we were all nervous. Had an incident that occurred right before my stick went out the plane, one of the new jumpers went out and he must have had poor body position or something, anyway, he was sort of rolled up in his chute. And the spotters, of course, were telling us what they saw, but he unrolled and came out of it OK. But that sort of shook us up for a minute. Well, we made our jumps and from then on it was just fun. Then, I think that we were supposed to have had seven practice jumps before we were ready to a fire, but they had some early fires and I made my first fire jump, I think, was my sixth jump. And I'd never been in an airplane before, in fact, I'd never landed in an airplane. I'd gone up seven times before I finally landed in an airplane. And my... I was trying to think of the first fire jump, it was on the Payette, I can't remember the name of it now... it was about sixteen of us jumped on it. And we had a... oh, about an eight mile pack out. [INTERRUPTION] ... got to go even. One of the aspects of the training that I neglected to mention that I thought was real good and I've used it later in my career on some of our crews, one of the last phases of our ground training are not... that's not correct... our training as smokejumpers is we made a practice jump about, I guess it was three miles from the McCall base, and they dropped all our cargo and at that point why we were supposed to pack all our stuff up as if we were on a fire and our chutes, and our jump chutes, the normal fire fighting equipment, and so forth and back pack it back to the base. And it was kind of a tradition that it turns out to be a race. And I had done so poorly in the obstacle course that I wanted to really show that I could do something right, so I really put a lot into that race back with the pack. In those days, the pack, I think, weighed 110 pounds. Anyway, I came in... I came in second, so I felt pretty good about that. But that was a part of the training that I think was real good because it was just exactly what it was all about, outside of the actual fire suppression phase.

FC Let's talk about some of the equipment you were using in those days and also the type aircraft you jumped from.

DW OK. Well, we were using three... basically three different kinds of aircraft. We were using the Ford Trimotor, that was our primary jump ship and if I remember right, it held eight jumpers and all their gear. And, of course, the... some of the things that were unique about the Ford Trimotor it was made out of corrugated metal and it rattled. And the engines were not synchronozed and they... they kind of groaned and moaned, but it was really a good jump ship because it was slow flying—it was just like jumping off of a... almost off of a platform, because it was so slow. And very stable, it could bring... take out quite a bit of weight out of short fields. It was really an early-day stole aircraft, I guess. The other aircraft we used,
the smallest aircraft, was the Travelaire. It was a single engine aircraft, and I believe it carried four jumpers and their gear. And the Travelaire was used quite extensively in those days to pick jumpers up from back... backwoods airstrips. We hadn't, really, any helicopters to retrieve jumpers in those days so the Travelaire did that job. And the other aircraft we used was the DC-2, I believe it was. And that ship would carry sixteen jumpers and that's the one we used if we were going quite long distances, or it needed a large crew. The jumpsuits were made out of canvas, the harness was cotton harness, and we were jumping twenty-eight foot Derry slotted chutes. And we still had a few eagle chutes in those days. They weren't really supposed to be part of our parachute contingent, but there were still some around and the overhead and our... at McCall liked to slip an eagle chute in once and a while, and when a new jumper didn't know he had it on his back, it was quite a surprise because eagle chute opened with a tremendous shock and much quicker than the twenty-eight foot regular Forest Service chute. The head gear is about the same as it was... is today--football-type helmet with a cage on it. Our... all of our gear weighed quite a bit more than what the equipment they have today weighs, which, I think, that's a big advantage that they're working on and something they need to even reduce more, if they can.

FC Let's kind of discuss your most memorial... memorable jump in '56.

DW Well, the one that comes to mind is, I think it was probably my second fire jump, and I remember that we were... it was a fire over on the breaks of the Salmon River and it was pretty steep, rough country and we had quite a bit of wind over the fire. I can remember my squad leader, who was Wayne Webb, last thing he told me before we went out the door, he said, "Webb," he said, "you face into the sun and just plane like hell and so you can get into that spot." He told me we had about a ten or twelve mile an hour wind. Well, I got out and did just exactly what he told me to do, I faced into the sun and I just planed it as hard as I could plane. And I ended up about three miles from the jump spot and everybody else, and what had happened (and I wasn't smart enough at that time to know) is I had an inversion, which is my canopy turned completely inside-out, which made me go 180 degrees from the way I should have went, so I ended up about three miles from the jump spot. But... didn't get hurt, but I learned a good lesson about that.

FC Was it potentially dangerous?

DW Well, it could have been because I came very close to going into a big rock slide, but I missed it by... oh, several hundred yards, I guess. It could have been bad.

FC Not because of the chute malfunctioning, but because of where you're going?

DW Well, because of the... well, the chute malfunctioned and me
not having enough knowledge to know that I had an inversion, because I shouldn't have been planing like I was instructed to do, but that situation is....

FC Was Wayne any relation?

DW No. Wayne is no relation.

FC Then what happened after you got three miles away from the fire?

DW Well, I finally worked my way back there. It took me about, I guess, four hours with all my gear and everything to get back to the crew. Got back there OK. I... well, in those days we didn't jump with radios and, of course, they were very concerned about me up in the airplane. And I put out my double "L," I think that's what we used to indicate that I was OK, and they went on with their business. And I finally got back to my crew in about four hours.

FC Do you remember who was on the crew?

DW No, I sure don't. [INTERRUPTION] There was another fire that I can remember in '56, it was the Owl Creek Fire over on the breaks of the Salmon River, it was on the Indianola District.

FC What forest?

DW Uh, that's the Salmon National Forest. And it was a fairly large fire... a project fire, I don't remember just the exact size now, but they sent a DC-2 or a DC-3 load from McCall over, and there was already Missoula jumpers on the fire. And we were... we were supposed to jump up at the top of the fire. Our instructions were to start building a line around the head of the fire. And so we got all on the ground, and our squad leader, who was "Paper Legs" Peterson, gathered us all up and saw that everybody was all right. We packed our gear up and secured it, and just about the time we were gonna start heading down the hill to start working on the fire line, a helicopter showed up. And we'd never seen a helicopter, some of us, before and it hovered right over the top of us and first it dropped a note to us, and it said, "Build a helispot here." And then it free fell a chainsaw, because we didn't jump with a chainsaw. Well, of course, the chainsaw broke when they free fell it. And so with that message "Paper Legs" got us all together and we... we had jumped late in the evening and we worked most all of that night trying to build this helispot up there, because of the note we received.

FC What were you using? Cross-cuts?

DW Cross-cuts and pulaskis. And there was quit a bit of clearing to do. We worked pretty hard at it, and anyway, by about daylight, we got the helispot finished and we took about an hour... hour and half break, and then we started down to do...
start building line, as we were originally instructed. We started down the hill, and we saw this guy coming towards us, and we could tell just by looking at him that he was upset about something. Normally our squad leader would be at the front of the line, but he wasn't; he was about half-way through the... we were in single... single formation there walking down the hill, "Paper Legs" was about half... back in the middle of the line someplace. Anyway, this... this fellow met us and he told us he was the District Ranger and he really started chewing on the first guy he met, of course, who he thought, I'm sure, was our squad leader, about why we had just spent the night sleeping up there and hadn't gotten down there and build any line that night. And, of course, "Paper Legs," he got up to the front and took the Ranger off to the side and explained what had happened, and that was the end of that, but...

FC What was the reason that this occurred?

DW I guess the... kind of one of those things where the left hand didn't know what the right was doing. One of his people apparently was in the helicopter, I think it was his district fire control officer, who I... his name... I can't remember his name now, a real well known old-time fireman from that district. But anyway, this fire control officer came up with the message to have us build a helispot there. He had some good reasons for it, I guess, but the Ranger didn't know it.

FC Was that over priority on the fire?

DW Well, it was at the head of the fire and I'm sure they were gonna try to move some people up there to it on the helispot.

FC But you didn't have it lined?

DW But we didn't have anything lined yet, no. We hadn't started the line. So anyway, that was one little incident that occurred on that fire.

FC Why did you call "Paper Legs" Peterson "Paper Legs?"

DW Well, all I know is what I was told. I guess when "Paper Legs"... he was raised in Salmon, and he was quite a basketball player. And the story that I heard was that when he ran up and down the court, he kind of had a little limp, and because of that limp, it looked like one leg was gonna fall out from under him all the time. And... but he could really dribble the basketball, apparently. And that's where I heard the name "Paper Legs" comes from.

FC Nothing to do with jumping?

DW Nothing to do with jumping.

FC Well, did you finally appease the Ranger?
DW Well, yes. He finally calmed down, but he was sure steaming when he met us. [laugh] We thought we were gonna get fired on the spot. But he finally understood the situation and we went about our job and finally got the fire under control.

FC Did they bring in other troops?

DW Yeah, they had a lot of troops before. We were... well, I think the Missoula jumpers were there first and they were at the bottom end of the fire and we were on the top. Before it was all over they had brought in a lot of....

FC How big a fire?

DW Well, I can't remember, Floyd. It... it was, you know, in the neighborhood of somewhere 5,000... 6,000 acres of land.

FC Pretty big one.

DW Pretty good sized fire.

FC How about some other fires in '56.

DW Well, let's see... oh, yeah. We had another fire, the Norton Ridge Fire, which is right over where the Challis, the Salmon... no, the Challis, the Payette, and the Boise all come together. There's a place called Norton Ridge and I can't remember whether it was eight or twelve of us from McCall jumped on the fire. And it was a... oh, twenty... thirty acre fire, and we got it all put out. And we had on radio with us that... on that fire, and the called us just about the time we were ready to leave the fire, and they said, "We don't want you to walk out, we're sending a helicopter to shuttle you out." Well, that was gonna be a new experience for us, because up to that point, nobody on the... to my knowledge at McCall had ever been retrieved by helicopter.

FC G-3B Bell?

DW Well, it was a... yeah, just a G... plain old G model, one of the real early thing... ships. And I believe it was Lynn Roberts, I might be... I'm pretty sure it was Lynn Roberts out of Boise, I think at that time that had the helicopter.

FC Was he the pilot?

DW And I think he was the pilot, yes. And anyway, he came up and he picked... of course, in those days the helicopters had to have a drop off point in order to pick up transitional lift. They just couldn't just pick you up from a hover at those elevations, so he had... he had picked out a spot where he could land right on the end of a cliff. And real heavy timber everywhere, you couldn't see an opening anyplace below him. So he started shuttling our crews off. Well, I was near the end of the list there of people being shuttled, and he came back and
picked me and one other fellow up and we dropped off this cliff and started flying down the country there over all this heavy timber. And all of a sudden the engine sputtered, and we thought we were gonna crash; and we would have, except it just happened that he made an autorotation into about the only little old meadow that was in the country. And he had run out of gas, and that was kind of an hair raising experience for our first time in a helicopter. And we didn't think much of helicopters for quite a while after that.

FC What do they call that incidents... aircraft incidents, anything happen after that?

DW If there was, I don't know. There may have been some repercussions further up, but I didn't know anything about it.

FC What about the facilities at McCall?

DW Well, we had, I believe, two or three barracks... they were military-type barracks... wooden barracks.

FC Old CCC [Civilian Conservation Corps] type?

DW Yes, they may have... may have been left over from CCC days, I'm not sure. They were quite old in '56, I know that. They were well painted, well maintained--that was part of the jumper's project work in the Summertime. And they were run in a military type manner. We had to have the floors mopped and waxed every morning. We had to have our beds made in military-type fashion. We were inspected by the squad leaders each day. It's quite different from today's standards. I think we were all real proud of the fact that we had a good, clean barracks. We had Forest Service kitchen in those days at McCall at the smokejumper base, and it was one of the best Forest Service kitchens that, I think, I've ever eaten in. It, and the one in Challis, they both stick out in my mind as really being good Forest Service kitchens. Fed us good, and a lot of it. The parachute loft was another real old building, but well maintained and just spotless. Wayne Webb was in charge of the parachute loft, and we... all of us had a lot of respect for Wayne.

FC Well, let's get into the '57 season, if there's any fires there that stick out in your mind... or training.

DW Well, '57, I was selected to be part of the New Mexico contingent from McCall and reported to McCall real early in the Spring. I think it was the first part of April and they sent us out to Secesh Camp to plant trees and there was still a lot of trees on the ground at that time. And they flew us in by airplane with skis on it, I remember that.

FC Where's Secesh?

DW Secesh would be, I believe, to the east, south-east of McCall, and I don't remember just how many miles. But there was
a... they had crew quarters there and a kitchen. And we were planting trees on the south-west slopes that had opened up. And I can't remember all of the people that were on our crew at that time. I remember Max Allan was our... our squad leader, and one of the other jumpers I can remember that was kind of a friend of mine, was Gene Crosby, and I'm afraid I can't remember the rest of the crew.

FC Now, what kind of ship... you had skis on it?

DW Yeah, it was... I believe it was like a Cessna 180.

FC 180 type.

DW Maybe, with skis. I'm not real sure about it. Anyway, we did our training to get in physical condition during that period of time. I think that we were out there, maybe, about six weeks. Following that, we came back into McCall and we went through our own refresher training at McCall, and then those of us that were going to New Mexico got all loaded up in a couple of cars and drove to Missoula, where we went through refresher training in Missoula. Roland Anderson was a Missoula foreman and he was our... gonna be our foreman in New Mexico. And we joined up there with jumpers from, of course, Region-1 in Missoula, and also from Region-6 jumpers, and, I think, Region-4 jumpers out of McCall and Idaho City.

FC What... what month was this?

DW This... this would have been in early May. And after our refresher training there... here in Missoula, why then we all headed for Silver City, New Mexico. And we flew down in a DC-3. And I can remember leaving all this green, lush country up here and all the water that there is around Missoula and McCall, and coming into Silver City, New Mexico (which I had never been in New Mexico before) it was... it looked like the most God-forsaken, burned out piece of country I'd ever seen in my life. Which is kind of ironic, because that's where I ended up my career and think it's beautiful now. But it was quite a shock when I first saw it.

FC Anything happen during the flight down?

DW No, not that I can remember. It was a fairly uneventful flight down there.

FC What where you thinking about going down there? Or were you sleeping?

DW [laugh] Well, did some sleeping, but I... just looking... for me, I was just seeing all the country. We flew over the Grand Canyon—that was quite a thrill for me. We did things back in those days we wouldn't think of doing today.

FC For instance?
Well, when we arrived over Silver City... the town of Silver City the pilot buzzed the town about three times and... to let everybody in Silver City knew the crew was there. And I mean really right down on the deck we went over the town. There wasn't any doubt that we had arrived. And the base at Silver City is about twenty two miles south of the town of Silver City. We landed out there... our facilities at that time was a small, wooden shack. Looked like it was left over, maybe, from the the CCC days. It was oh, maybe a twenty by twenty wooden building that had a cook stove in it, and a telephone, and a table, and I few chairs, I think that was basically all there was.

Did you say the pilot buzzed Silver City, or the base? Or both?

No, he buzzed Silver City... the town of Silver City.

To let the girls know you're there.

Let all the girls and everybody know we'd arrived.

What was the pilot's name?

Ah... Hank Jory.

Hank Jory.

Yes. And the co-pilot was Grant Ruth. Anyway, that's how we arrived in Silver City. And then we came into town and the facilities they had in... this was 1957 now, they were in the process of building a new barracks in town and so they put us up that Summer in an old hotel called the Bullard Hotel right down in the middle of town. And parachute loft in Silver City was a pretty nice facility. It was right downtown and had two packing tables and that's where we'd begin our work shift there, and then the ones that were on the top of the jump list would be moved out to this little shack out at the airport each day. 1957 in New Mexico was a pretty hot fire season. A lot of small fires--two man... four man type jumper fires. And it's high elevation down there. We made jumps on every district of the forest, the fire control officer there at that time was Joey Baldwin and he was a real supporter of the use of smokejumpers. And we got used a lot. I believe I left there with twenty-two fire jumps, which was a pretty good year.

I remember reading some smokejumper book talking about "Joey jump-'em-all."

Yeah. Yeah, he use to... that was kind of his philosophy. He... he hit them hard with everything he had, and of course, jumpers was one of his major resources. We... the Gila National Forest, which was out of Silver City, received it's first helicopter in 1957. It was another "G" model helicopter. I remember being picked up off of a fire there for the first time.
with the helicopter. Now, I was already a little bit goosey about helicopters after my incident up on the Payette. But I remember this pilot came in to pick two of us off of a ridge someplace and it was just kind of drizzling a little bit, and he's out there in the helicopter and he kept looking at the rain and looking at his watch and looking at everything we were bringing in and he looked down and he saw my... I had a gallon canteen there. He asked me if that canteen had water in it. I said: "Well, yeah it does." He said, "Why don't you pour that water out." I told him, "If that was gonna make the difference, I'd just walk." [laugh]

FC Eight pounds is all that, huh?

DW Yeah. But I did go ahead and ride out with him and we had no problems. We had a... one real bad injury that occurred with a McCall jumper, his name was Bob Spinde, I believe. And he was on a fire that I jumped... I can't think of the name of the place now... Rainy Mesa, we had a fire out on Rainy Mesa and he dropped and picked up an oscillation... real hot temperatures and, like I say, high elevation... it was probable somewhere around 9,000 feet. And anyway, he came in way too hard and broke his back. And it was about a... they sent a jeep in from a little town named Reserve, New Mexico and we had to take him out on that jeep on a real bad road. Took about four hours to get into Reserve. And we shot Spinde full of Demerol, and he made the trip OK but I sure felt sorry for him.

FC Was he in a Stokes litter pretty well tied down?

DW He was down on a... in a litter. I don't remember if it was a Stokes or not. It was a special back litter that they dropped from the airplane, I remember that.

FC Did he recover from that injury?

DW I... I really don't know. I'm sure he must... he may still have some problems with it, but I haven't seen Spinde for years and years, so I just don't know. He didn't that Summer, of course.

FC Just because he was oscillating?

DW I think so. He caught an oscillation just before he hit the ground, and he was already coming in pretty hot. Everybody came in pretty hard on that jump. That was the only injury, really, I can remember. Another incident that occurred in '57 is we had two fellows that... that... one was Pete Hoilrup and the other guy's name was Frank Drake. And they jumped in an area of the Gila and they got lost, and they wondered around for five days before they finally... somebody found them.

FC How come they got lost?

DW Well, they just got turned around in the country where they
dropped was quite flat and heavy timber and they just went the wrong direction to start with and then got mixed up. They were... it was an area where there's no roads or anything and they just... just got disoriented.

FC They weren't using the compass and the map?

DW Well, apparently they weren't. [laugh] I don't know what the problem was. But anyway, they were out there five days and had us all kind of worried for a while, but they came out all right. And after our fire season terminated there in Silver City, why then we returned back to McCall and finished up the fire season in McCall. And we went to California that Fall and dropped on several fires... oh, up around Redding, California. I can remember one incident there, a fire that we jumped on called the Lady Bug Fire. And, gosh, from the aircraft it just looked like pine trees with a nice grass under story and looked like a real... what we call a "marshmellow-type" jump... small fire. And... but when we got down there through those trees, they were huge trees, 120... 140 feet, I would estimate. And underneath the brush was twelve... fourteen feet high. And we had to crawl and holler to each other and we couldn't walk through it, you just had to crawl on your hands and knees finally to find each other. And we were on about... we had three separate little fires we were taking care of there.

FC What forest was that on?

DW That would be the Shasta-Trinity National Forest.

FC So they had several... the fires were pretty close to each other?

DW They were pretty close to each other. And finally after we got them all put out and got ourselves together. And it was just a miserable... all the conditions were bad. It was difficult to get through the brush, and there were a lot of gnats and some kind of bugs in there, and it was hot... really hot. Anyway, we finally got the fires out and we were suppose to pack up to a certain spot where Charley Caldwell, who's... was one of the district firemen on that district at the time, was gonna meet us and take us back to Redding. I can remember walking up the hill and we were all tired and mad and I think at that particular time I wondered whether this was a very good job or not. But, of course, once you get back to the city again, why everything turned out fine, we were happy again. But it was a pretty miserable little fire we were on.

FC Because of the extreme fuels and brush and everything.

DW Uh-huh. And I think that pretty much winds up 1957.

FC How about '58?

DW '58 I spent just jumping on the Gila. I had become a
FC  Stationed in Silver City?

DW  Stationed in Silver City. And jumped several small fires. I can't remember any real... oh, yes. We did have one project fire that was kind of unique that year.

[END OF SIDE A]

[BEGIN Side B]

DW  ... fire started the fire and was reported pretty quickly by some of the look outs. And anyway, it was in a very remote part of the Black Range. And so they came down through town and they had the police and everybody hunting up all the smokejumpers they could find, and most of them were in the Buffalo Bar. And we sent the whole crew, all twenty-five of us, went out and dropped on this... what was called the Flair Fire.

FC  They were pretty good condition on the Flair Fire?

DW  [laugh] No. That's another thing, we use to do a lot of things back in those days that we wouldn't do today, but there were several of them that I know were quite inebriated when they went out of the airplane. But we got the fire out. We had one accident, and a pretty severe accident on that fire. Dick Tracy, who used to be a Missoula jumper and retired from Redding, California, he cut his leg real bad with a Pulaski, and we had to get him out of the fire. But that's... that's really about the only incident I can remember on the Gila that year.

FC  Did any of them get airsick because of the drinking?

DW  That happened occasionally. And usually when that happened, if somebody got sick, why a squad leader would push them right up to the front of the line and get them out of the airplane because if they got sick in the plane they'd have the whole crew sick, so...

FC  Very contagious.

DW  So that did happen, yeah.

FC  Anything else in '58?

DW  I can't really think... there probably were, Floyd, but I can't think of them right now.

FC  Well, you were in Silver City in '59, too?

DW  Yes. I started out the fire season in '59 in Silver City and we had a... you know, I guess, just an average season, if I remember right. I can't remember any... anything too unique
about our season until we got back to... let's see, in '59 I came back to Missoula and finished out the season here in Missoula, and my wife is from Silver City and had spent all her life in Silver City before coming up to Missoula with me that year. And she had never seen clouds more than a day at a time, I don't think, and we got to Missoula and stayed in a cabin right down near where the old saw mill was in town there. And I remember I thought I was gonna lose my wife because she got so depressed because it went for about three weeks without ever seeing the sky. It was just cloudy and drizzly. [laugh]

FC What month is this?

DW Well, it would have been in July and August.

FC Normally you don't find that many clouds... that's normal in the Wintertime, but...

DW Well, like now there's none. But that particular time there was about two weeks or three weeks of just steady clouds, and boy, she was sure getting depressed. We had one thing that occurred then that I remember now is... this little cabin we stayed in was right across from the old deck... the log deck that was... seemed to me to be right in the middle of town.

FC That's probably about where the shopping mall... Southgate Mall is right now.

DW Is that right? Well anyway, the deck caught on fire and by this time, of course, there were air tankers. And they had TBMs stationed here at the depot. And when that deck caught on fire, I'll tell you, it was quite a show because the turn around time was just literally one or two minutes. It seemed like just long enough to load up the plane, they'd be off again. And they're hitting that deck fire with slurry.

FC But they didn't do very good the day on the deck fire?

DW No.

FC Just a waste of...

DW It was really a waste.

FC It really evaporated?

DW Yeah. It was so hot that it just evaporated it. Of course, that was their beginning stages of the use of of slurry and they... and they thought they were doing good. And that's... I can't really recall fires... oh, yeah, I can too. We went to the Hat Creek Fire in '59 down... just out of Salmon... Salmon, Idaho. And it was while we were on that fire that we were building line... a long continuous line when the earthquake occurred down on the Yellowstone country. And I remember that was quite an experience. I'd never been in any kind of a tremor
or anything of the like. And we had just taken a break. Our squad leader told us to get up into a rock slide and sit down and take a break. And we were sitting in this rock slide and all of a sudden we felt the earth shaking and moving and the trees just looked like they were rubber, swaying back and forth and it lasted for, I suppose, just a part of a minute. I don't know... remember now how long. I remember one of the district people come running through the woods and his eyes were as big as saucers. He's been out in the middle of all those trees when they started wiggling, I guess he got a pretty good scare. We didn't know, of course, at that time that the earthquake had taken place in Yellowstone.

FC  That was later at night, too. You were working...

DW  Yeah, that was at night... I don't know, probably 10:00 or 11:00 at night, I think. And another thing that occurred on that same fire, I was assigned to work on a... with a saw team on that particular fire and a fellow, a Canadian jumper... Canadian boy that was jumping out of Missoula by the name of John Morarrow (?) was a part of our saw team. And I can't really remember the details of it now, but anyway, a snag hit him. Whether it was one we were falling or whether it hit another snag and hit the broke the top, I don't remember just... the details, but anyway, he got hurt on that fire.

FC  How was he hurt?

DW  Hit him on the head and hit hard hat probably saved his life because it was... seemed like kind of a glancing blow, if it had... it didn't hit him direct, but it hit him enough that it injured him.

FC  Well, did he... knock him out and then you have to pack him out?

DW  Yeah. We had to pack him out, we used the old litter with the big wheel on it and got him down off the mountain. We thought, maybe, there'd be a fatality, because he looked pretty bad when he left, but he came out of it OK. And I... I really can't think of any other incidents during '59.

FC  No other fires in Region-1?

DW  Well, there probably were. Floyd, but I just can't recall them now.

FC  Well, '60 was a good fire season in this region, but you weren't here then, were you?

DW  '60, again, I jumped out of Silver City and we had a pretty good season in Silver City in 1960. I can't recall anything unique right now. But then I went from the Silver City season, when it terminated, I went to McCall and jumped to finish up the season there. We did have an incident that occurred there in
1960 that was sort of... it was a rescue mission. And apparently what happened is a cargo ship left Jackson Hole [Wyoming] with a pick up... well, it was a school teacher, and one was a cargo dropper, and one other person.

FC Forest Service contract?

DW Yes, Forest Service contract to...

FC Paracargo?

DW Yeah, paracargo. They were gonna drop cargo on some little fire. And it was... I remember a school teacher, and a Forest Service employee, and then the pilot--there was three of them in the plane. Anyway, they never showed up to drop the cargo. And I guess they looked for them all one day and they had the C.A.P. [Civilian Air Patrol] looking for them, and they couldn't find the ship. So anyway, the next morning they called McCall and asked for us to come down and help look for them. And we went down in a DC-3, I believe... I think it was a DC-3, anyway, it was "Paper Legs" Peterson, Ray Beasley, Shep Johnson, and myself. And we landed in Jackson Hole and we got the co-ordinates of where the ship... the downed ship was supposed to have gone, and we started flying course and we flew course a lot lower that the C.A.P. And on our first... first flight... over-flight of the route that the other ship should have taken, we spotted the wreckage. Just caught a little glimpse of orange of the tail, or some section of it. And so we found a jump spot right close by and... I can't remember now the order in which we went out, but I think that Shep Johnson and I went together. And anyway, we got out and we... the jump spot was pretty small, so we went out real close together and Shep fell through... I guess I went out first and Shep followed me and he went through my shroud lines. And we were tangled up up there in the air for a little bit, finally we got untangles. But we were coming down close enough that we could talk to each other, and I remember Shep yelling over, "Hey Webb! Do you see what's down there below us?" And I look down at the jump spot and right where we were suppose to gonna land, why there was about three big bull elk standing there. We... all of a sudden we got to thinking, you know, "That might not be too... too good if we got our shroud lines tangled up on one of those racks of the elk." So we started yelling at them to make them move out of the way. Of course the elk didn't... they kept looking everywhere but up. And just luckily we hit the jump spot and didn't get tangled up in the elk, and when we hit the ground the elk moved on off. But anyway, the... we got up to the wreckage and all three men were dead. The plane had burned and there was still a little bit of fire around the ship. And so then we had to camp there that night until the coroner's jury got there. And that was sort of the end of that.

FC What was the reason the ship crashed?

DW They never really knew. It looked like they might have been over grossed and they... it looked like they had... they were too
low in trying to go over the top of a little ridge, and they just didn't make it—but that was just conjecture, don't know... I never did see any kind of an accident report on it.

FC What were the names of the victims?

DW I don't know. I don't recall. But it was right out of there in the Teton... well it was on the... on the Bridger Teton National Forest and seemed to me it was a little bit south and west of Teton National Forest. And, of course, we had several fires that season, but I can't really recall anything unique or interesting.

FC So there we no more fires in '60 that come to mind?

DW Not that come to mind right at the moment, no.

FC Well, in '61 you were dispatching down in Region-3, and a little later as a fire staff on the Gila and you're role somewhat reversed in that you were supervising and ordering jumpers and so on. Give some incidents that you might want to discuss.

DW Yeah, that was quite a... quite a change for me. A real learning process, from being a smokejumper on the Gila to now, all of a sudden, being the fire staff and being responsible for the supervision and management of the jumpers. I learned some good lessons there that... found out that some of the things I thought were a little bit unnecessary, and weird, and maybe a little bit too GI when I was a jumper, I found out the reasons for some of them when I became a manager down there. There was some good reasons for some of the things my previous bosses had done.

FC Give me a couple examples.

DW Oh, let me give one example: for instance, we did... we use to do a lot of joking and some horseplay in the airplane when I was a jumper, things that we thought were kind of funny. All of a sudden when I became responsible and had to have some kind of a... set some sort of a standard for the rest of the troops, I found out that those things weren't quite as funny and that I couldn't allow myself to do some of those things that I use to do. I guess one example was: one time I was flying with a pilot and I was sitting in the right seat of the jumpship and the pilot said, "Why don't you go ahead and fly the airplane for a little bit? And I'll go do something..." whatever it was. And I really couldn't let... allow that to happen anymore, because if I did that, I felt that would be a poor example to set for the rest of the jumpers. You get a pilot, flying that ship and responsible for all those people back there, you better keep the pilot up there flying the airplane and not somebody else.

FC What was he gonna do?

DW Oh, he was just gonna go back and joke with them that nobody
was flying the airplane. Oh, gosh, I can't think of too many... well, there's... you know, when you're a jumper, you think that all the fires that occur should be jumper fires, and you gripe and complain if they send somebody else to fight the fire instead of calling on the jumpers. Well, I learned pretty quick when you're responsible for getting... putting the fires out, that you use the best resource you have and the closest one sometimes rather than who you... you don't just pick jumpers all the time. And we had other good fire fighters on the forest that worked hard, and trained hard, and were good. And you couldn't just give all the gravy to the smokejumpers anymore. I had to use whoever was good and who was closest. And so it put you in the roll of sometimes not making the decisions that was most favorable to your buddies out there.

FC Is this one item that should be stressed more in jumper training?

DW I think it should. Yeah, I think it'd be real good to stress...

FC Assuming it isn't, but maybe it is.

DW Yeah, yeah. I'm not sure that it is, because they... problem is still there today. In fact, I heard it last night, [laugh] talking to some of the jumpers that just come back from the Gila and they were complaining about they didn't get as many jumps on certain districts as they use to and that... and so forth and... but I understand those things better now. And when you're responsible for the taxpayers money and responsible to keep the fires small, why you do what you have to do what's best, not just because you use to be one of the smokejumpers. And sometimes that doesn't make you real popular but you have to do it. Well, those are some... just examples of things that made the job a little different. One of the things I tried to do when I came there, try to treat the jumpers like they were adults. Jumpers are kind of unique fire fighters. First of all, they're quite independent. They're normally a little bit older than the normal fire crews we have on the districts. They've got a lot of experience on initial attack. And they seem to have a lot of different kinds of talents, they got carpenters and electricians, and they got people that are good with horses, and they just got a lot of talents in the crew. And one of the things I felt, anyway, is that I could get a lot more out of the crew if I told them what I wanted done--gave them the end result and let them go about it in their own way to get the job done rather than laying out each detail for them, how they should go about doing it and so forth. I'd try to just tell the foreman what kinds of things I wanted to end up with--the end result--and then let him ferret out who was the best man to do the job, and how to go about the detail work. And we go along pretty good in eleven years that I was there, working that way. One of the other things that I think I learned while I was a jumper that helped me as a supervisor was the fact that you don't keep the jumpers in the dark. If there's something that's got to be done, a policy that
has to be enforced, or whatever. You tell them right up front just how it's got to be and why it's got to be done that way, and it seemed to work real good with that approach. I've seen some other jumper bases and jumper units where it seemed like they... the policy makers sort of let them out as to the reasons why, and didn't get their input in the policy making, and I tried not to do that down there. A good example of that, not so much policy, but my predecessor down there for some reason, which I don't think, probably, was his fault, but whenever he would leave the supervisor's office and start driving towards the airport, I find out they had a code (well, I can remember, because I was a part of it when I was a jumper) there was code that we used, either on the radio or the telephone, to call and let them know that the big boss was coming to the airport so that everybody would look busy and so forth. One of the first things I did when I got there in '73, I went out to the smokejumper base after the jumpers arrived, and I told them they... "I've been here. You guys don't need to do that. Whenever I get in the truck to come out here, you haven't any work to do you don't have to jump up and make busy like you're doing work. Just stay put, because that ain't gonna bother me. But if I got something that I want done, I'm gonna tell you and then I expect it to be done. And we got along fire for all eleven years, and to my knowledge they didn't set up a code for me. But it was a... it was a very interesting eleven years. And enjoyable, working not only with the rest of the fire resources we had on the Gila, but the jumper crew and I appreciated those years of working with them.

FC Did you get involved very much in the... well, I can't say jumper training at Silver City, but I would ask that question and orientation—that type of thing?

DW Well, my involvement with the orientation... you mean of the jumpers?

FC Involvement in the orientation.

DW My part of that was we put together what we called the "Mode Plan" for the forest each year, and it set out all of the forest policy. This is something, too, that jumper units... they really need more training on. When they go from their home base to a new forest or another agency, everybody's got a little different procedures, different policies. And often times I think that if a crew isn't give a good orientation of what those changes are when they get there it just... it's a built in problem for the jumpers as well as the forest or the agency they're going to help. And so we tried to write down what our policies were and my involvement would be to give those policies to the jumper foreman and he instructed his people on them.

FC Give me an example of what types of policy you're talking about.

DW OK. A policy that we had down there was... well, just to give you an example, I think up in this country, and I don't know
if it's still true, but it used to be true that you had to remain on a fire for twenty-four hours after you saw the last smoke. Well, in our forest down there, the policy was that you didn't abandon a fire until you were absolutely sure it was dead out. But there wasn't a twenty-four hour mandatory waiting period, but it was up to that fire boss of that fire and he was responsible to determine if that fire was out and it wouldn't be a reburn. So when the jumpers would get down there, we had to explain how our policy was different. An other example would be cold trailing. A lot of times cold trailing is a normal practice in some areas of the country. Down there cold trailing, our policy was that cold trailing was never done unless you had a line officer's approval beforehand to do it, and he only could give that in certain situations. Well those are things that have to be explained to the... a crew coming from another area, or they don't know. And they could get themselves in trouble and get the forest in trouble. So those are the kinds of things that we tried to give in our orientation. And we tried to have most of that written down so that our foremen would have it right there in front of him and could instruct his crew.

FC You might elaborate on what you mean on "cold trailing."

DW Well, cold trailing in... a lot of times you'll get to a fire where the fire has basically burned itself out, and it looks black, and it looks like there's no more fire left there. And in some areas of the country, and in some agencies you can simply skip over when you're building line around your fire, you can come to that point and kind of skip over it and go to where the fire's the hot again and go building your line, and then later you come back and you put a line around the cold trail. But in our country, because we got so many flashy fuels down in the Southwest, and the humidity's... just a few degrees difference in humidity can change it and what appears to be out can start up again. And there's been some very embarrassing situations because people have skipped over those supposedly cold looking areas of the fire and gone on. So our policy is that you have to feel every inch of it by hand... with your bare hands and only where there's a safety concern do you actually skip over and not build the line. You build the line around the entire fire even though it looks cold and maybe is cold.

FC What type of fuel would carry something over that you might assume it was out? For instance, cow dropping or is it a little bit of wood?

DW Sotos. That's our big... one of the big problems down there that I don't think they have up in the northern regions is soto bush. It's a kind of a desert-type bush that has a very shallow root system and right down near the base of this plant, when all the leaves are burned off, it's almost a round ball. But the round ball is full of resins and like kerosene almost and it will burn and burn and burn. And when that root burns off, that ball rolls down the hill and crosses your lines and starts a fire down below you and so forth. So, that's one example of the fuel-type
that's a little different down there. That was another thing that we tried to give good orientation to the jumpers for. Because it's a little different than what they're use to.

FC Well, you were a Class One fire boss on a number of project fires, Don, how about when you had jumpers and other attack personnel under your command as far as building line and so on, how do you rate... rate them?

DW Well, I... as I kind of mentioned to you, I have to rate them very high and I hope I'm not doing it because of any bias. And I don't think I am. When we had a... had a particularly difficult piece of line that had to be built, if I had a jumper unit on the fire, and this wouldn't only be my decision, but the line bosses we had on our team were the same... came from the same place, we'd almost invariably put the jumper unit in to build that piece of difficult line. And I think it relates back to the supervision and training that they come there with, to work as a team and their ability to go ahead and make decisions out there on the line where they have to be made as to where to lay the line, when to burn it out, when to fire out a certain piece of line. They got the capability and the training to do that and, again, it was a place where you could give them your objective of what you wanted to end up with and then leave them alone and they... they would seem to get the job done.

FC You attribute that to a pretty excellent supervision and training?

DW That's, I think, right were it comes from. That and the esprit de corps. They... they've worked together a lot, they get a lot of people coming back each year, and they know how each person works, they know where the weaknesses are, they know where the strong points are amongst their people. And I think it's just good tight discipline, and supervision, and training that makes them just a top-notch crew.

FC How about any uneasiness over some fire that you may have been planning to jump on... potential rate of spread, and you know, hazardous conditions, do you have any of those. They weren't all...

DW No. You mean while... when I was a jumper?

FC Yeah.

DW Yeah, I can remember one. The name of the fire was the Galena Fire, and I can't remember which year it was now.

FC What forest?

DW It would be... is Sun Valley, Idaho on the Sawtooth National Forest?

FC I'm not sure.
DW Well anyway, it was right out of Sun Valley and I don't remember the name of the forest, but we jumped out of McCall on that fire and "Paper Legs" Peterson was our... our squad leader and I don't remember now whether it was twelve or sixteen of us jumped on the fire. We jumped at the top of the fire and it was about three hundred acres at the time. There was ground suppression troops down at the bottom end of the fire.

FC But you were above the fire?

DW We were above the fire at the top and our instructions were to start lining around the head of it. And we got out and we started lining... lining the fire and all of a sudden we heard this roar and we could tell that it was torching out and running through the crowns. I remember "Paper Legs," he had us all get into a somewhat of an opening, we still had trees above us, but there wasn't a lot of underbrush, had us clear out an area for each of us to lay down.

FC You had fire shelters?

DW We had no... that was before the days of fire shelters. We took our canteens and he had us put handkerchiefs over our mouths. Each of us poured water over each other's shoulders and that was before the time of fire resistant shirts, also. And we laid there and held onto our hard hats and the fire went right over the top of us through the trees, and about all we got out of it was a few sparks landed on our shoulders and we beat them out of each others when they'd feel one.

FC How long was that after you dropped?

DW Oh, let's see... we dropped mid-afternoon and that was just before evening, I think.

FC A couple hours then.

DW Yeah, a couple hours.

FC But that's pretty tough sometimes to jump above a fire.

DW Uh-huh. But that was probably one of the most scary experiences, I think, I had during my career. And I really appreciated... and I think this is another plus with the jumpers, you have somebody like "Paper Legs" Peterson that has so many fires behind him and being in those kind of situations and you respect his knowledge. And even though you might want to get up and run, you don't because you know "Paper Legs" knows what he's doing.

FC Yeah, but you might have had some new jumpers, then how would you... how would you get them instigating that obedience?

DW Yeah, at that time... that particular fire, I wasn't a new
jumper anymore, but I'm sure we had some on our crew and I really
can't... I can't speak for how they felt.

FC Similar situation in Mann Gulch when Wag Dodge said to
follow him and some of them panicked, if you can say that,
because nobody knows, really... and so on.

DW I think you have to have a lot of trust and respect for the
guy that's in charge of you.

FC Almost blind obedience, but not absolute.

DW Uh-huh. And I've always felt that, even when I was fire
boss. I believed in real tight discipline. I believed in
listening to... when you had time to make a decisions where you
could discuss them, I believe in getting all the input you could,
but when you had to make a decision everybody on our team, I
think, understood the fire boss will make the decision and he
expects everybody to do just exactly what he says, whether they
believe in it or not. And I think that's still a good philosophy
today.

FC You ever been in any other hairy situations... as a jumper?

DW Well, nothing to that extent, Floyd, that's...

FC Not on fires?

DW No.

FC How about hairy situations when you're airborne or cargo
dropping?

DW Yeah. I did have one of those, too... couple of those. One
time we were dropping hay into White Creek Cabin, which is
real... down in the bottom of a big, narrow canyon.

FC What forest?

DW On the Gila National Forest. And we were dropping out of a
DC-3 just bales of hay, just free falling them into this cabin.
And one of the bales of hay, for whatever reason--whether the
pilot let the tail get a little bit low, or whether some
turbulence pushed the bale of hay up--anyway, hit the horizontal
stabilizer and put a... oh, it made the ship jerk and bounce, and
we thought we were gonna go in. But anyway, the pilot recovered
and we got back to the airport OK. It had a great big dent in it
and so we quit dropping hay out in that manner in White Creek
after that.

FC Was that in a DC-3?

DW That was a DC-3.

FC That could have been a near-miss, too.
Oh, it could have been real close. Another thing that happened on the DC-3 one day that... we use to... a lot of times we... and I don't think they do that anymore, we use to, when we were coming back from a cargo mission or a jump mission, and we had jumpers aboard we never closed the door, we never even put the strap... yeah, we put the strap across... on single strap, but often times the hydraulic fumes and the... if the pilot smoked, why the fumes would get kind of bad in the airplane. And so it was quite common to go down and lay right by the open door and put your arm around where the static line came into the floor and just lay there because you got good, fresh air there and everything. Well, one day we were coming into Grant County Airport there at Silver City for a landing and one of these twisters came across the runway right in as we were making... just about the time we were touching our wheels down. And the twister veered the ship completely at... oh, probably a 45 degree angle off the runway and through the desert. He hit yucca trees... er, yuccas, cactus, and bushes, and I happened to be laying in the door that day and I bounced completely up, hit the... I don't know if I went all the way up and hit the ceiling or not, but I bounced clear off the floor, I remember that.

You weren't... you weren't tied down with a seatbelt then?

No seatbelts, no nothing. None of us used seatbelts. That taught me a lesson that wasn't too safe a procedure.

Was that a wind shear-type thing instead of a twister or...?

Yeah... well, it was a... no it was a twister, because they said afterwards that they saw this, you know, dust devil coming across the runway. It was kind of a close call.

Very unstable air. So you hit some... what'd you say, yucca trees?

Yuccas.

Yuccas. And then what happened?

Well, it just banged up the wings and it seemed like the horizontal stabilizer again and banged them up. They had to do some maintenance on the airplane. That was about all it amounted to.

But you weren't using belts?

Uh-huh. We had them, but we weren't using them.

Now that you're old enough now...

Oh, yeah. There's a lot of things that we use to do that we don't do today. We're smarter today. We use to go into Negrito Airstrip on the Gila, which is at 8400 feet, and we'd go in there...
with a DC-3 and a full load of jumpers—sixteen jumpers—and all the gear, and sit there sometimes to wait out a storm and then take off. Now we know that if that engine coughed once we all went in, so we quite doing that sort of thing. We get smarter as we go. Getting smarter, I guess, each day.

FC Did you ever have any incidents when engines gave you trouble, besides that 'copter that ran out of gas?

DW No. I had one other incident where a pilot forgot to switch his fuel tanks and we were on a low level patch dropping cargo, and the engine coughed and he got switched back over in time, but it sure scared us.

FC I've heard that story before.

DW Yeah, that was in the old Twin Beech, and they were... it was quite common for that to happen. I think I'm about talked out, Floyd.

FC Well, it's been great, Don. It's fine. See you at the banquet tonight.

DW OK.

FC OK.

[END OF INTERVIEW]