Interview with Gary Welch by Floyd Cowles on 21 July 1984 for the Smokejumper Oral History Project. OH #133-112.

FC Floyd Cowles interviewing Gary Welch for the Smokejumper Oral History Project at the Aerial Fire Depot on Saturday, July 21st, 1984. Gary was a jumper at Cave Junction primarily in the years 1960, '61, '62. Gary can you give me an autobiography of yourself?

GW Floyd, I was born in Snavelyville, Texas May 23, 1939. When I was four years old, in 1943, we moved to Post, Texas in Garzeck County where my Dad and his brother bought a ranch in 1936. And I lived in Post until I graduated from high school, again, on my birthday, May 23rd, 1957. On that day I received a letter from the blister... blister rust service in Priest River, Idaho that I'd been accepted up there for employment. And I left shortly thereafter, rode up to Yellowstone National Park with my brother and a friend who were working there as park rangers. I hitchhiked on up to Priest River and out on Priest Lake and spent that summer working blister rust control. Sometime, a year or two before, I'd seen a movie that a lot of other people had seen before, Red Skies Over Montana that had stimulated my interest in smokejumping. And hitchhiking up to Idaho I went through Missoula and saw the... the jump base here, in Missoula. So the following fall, I entered Texas Tech[nological College] and applied to Missoula for a job in smokejumping. But the summer I had worked in Idaho, the summer of '57, had been a rainy summer, we had no fires, I had no fire experience, and consequently did not get the job. But that was the only Forest Service job I'd applied for that summer, so I had to stay back... stayed in Texas that summer and worked in the oil field on a pipe line construction crew. And applied the following summer to all five smokejumper bases as well as to a couple of the Forest Service jobs. I got a job at Detroit Ranger Station in Detroit, Oregon, worked the summer there as a... on a brush crew in a fire [INAUDIBLE] little wilderness area at Mount Jefferson.

OK. Bringing on down my career from Detroit... the summer I worked in Detroit, which was the summer of '59, I had decided that I was having a difficulty figuring out what I was going to do career-wise, so that semester I worked the summer of '59 in Detroit, Oregon, left for Salem, Oregon, hitchhiked across the United States to New York. Took a plane from New York to Glasgow, Scotland and spent the Fall--when I should have been in school--hitchhiking around Europe on the Youth Hostel Program. I came home for Christmas the Summer of '59, went to work in the oil field for about six weeks. And at that time I applied to Cave Junction, Oregon for the job of smokejumping. And re-entered Texas Tech in January of '60 and received my... after I'd been given a job at Cave Junction for the summer of '60, where I took my training.

FC What was your college major?

GW I changed it to accounting. I took a bunch of preference test, and I'd been majoring in physical education, but I was too
money hungry to be satisfied with my... what lay ahead in that field, so I scored high on the mathematics and accounting, so I changed my major to accounting. Laying out that one semester was probably a real good thing for me. I went to Cave Junction in May of 1960, got there about a week before training started. Jim Allen, the project air officer put me to work painting fences and whatever until the rest of the jumpers showed up for training. We had eighteen jumpers, which was a real large class... training rookies for one season at Cave Junction. We had a real strong class, we had a lot of esprit de corps and really enjoyed the training phase. I believe all eighteen jumpers completed the seven jumps and became smokejumpers.

After my three summers at Cave Junction, I completed my last season, summer of '62, went back to Tech--I had one semester to finish. I graduated January, 1963 with a Bachelor of Business Administration and Accounting, I was also commissioned a second lieutenant in the Army at the same time. I reported to Fort Benning, Georgia February 22nd, 1963 to go through the entry officer's basic course. I applied while at Fort Benning for airborne training. I went through the entry officer's basic course, finished number one in my class in the physical combat efficiency test, but was turned down for airborne training because of color vision defect. I'd gone through the flight program in R.O.T.C. [Reserve Officer Training Corps] for helicopter pilot. I went in with a 1981-MOS, which is helicopter rotor wing pilot. But when I took the color vision test at Fort Benning, the color defect showed up, not only couldn't I go to flight school, I couldn't jump. I spent about half a day arguing with a Major over at the jump training center at Fort Benning. I could distinguish red from green, it was just a slight color defect. He said they were working on the problem, but as of that time if you couldn't distinguish light pink from light-light pink, you couldn't jump. So I went from Fort Benning to Fort Hood, Texas where I spent the remaining... my two years of my military career, most... seventeen months of which were attached to post special services: playing football and wrestling and swimming on the... was on the swimming team. I received my discharge February 22nd, 1965 at Fort Hood, Texas, went directly to Dallas, Texas where I went to work for the United States Treasury Department as a national bank examiner. I worked as a bank examiner for five years stationed at Amarillo, Texas; Abilene, Texas; and Waco, Texas. In October, 1969 I accepted the job as vice-president of Community State Bank in Waco, Texas where I worked for approximately four years. In August, 1973 I became vice-president of the First State Bank in Riesel, Texas, which is a small country bank, located about thirteen miles south east of Waco. I'd gone out there with a hand shake deal with the president of the bank at that time to buy the bank within a five year period. And on January 8th, 1979 I bought the controlling interest from J. A. Booth, Jr., the guy that owned the bank at that time. For a brief two day period, I owned 100% of the stock, until I sold off about 2.5% to the other directors for [inaudible] shares. I've been with the bank since that time. I had to scramble to find the time to get away and get up here to the reunion.
That brings my career down to current time. I would like to drop back and say that on May 4th, 1963, between Fort Benning and Fort Hood, during my Army career, I was married to Via Lacey Hambrit. We have four children: my son, Lance, who will be his third year at Texas Tech this Fall, he just turned twenty years old; Kim, age sixteen, who will be a junior in Richfield High School in Waco; Cody, my son, who's thirteen will be in eighth grade a Plaker Junior High in Waco; and my daughter, Whitney, who is seven and will be in second grade this coming year.

FC You mentioned your boys want to get into jumpers.

GW Yeah, especially since they came up to the reunion. My sixteen year old would go out and jump right now if somebody just put a chute on his back. My twenty year old is being influenced by his mother, he won't say much around her, but... one thing I failed to mention, when I jumped in the Fall... I mean, the Summer of 1960 the following Summer my younger brother, Larry, and my older brother, Bernie, came up and trained--they were two of only six that trained in the summer of 1961. You need to get my brother Larry in here, he jumped for seventeen seasons.

FC Quite a long time.

GW He is an old-timer. But.... The summer of 1961 when my brother Larry, who is two years younger than me came up to train, and my older brother, Bernie Welch, who's four years older. The summer they trained was an unique summer for us--the first time in several years all three of us were working together, it was like seven or eight years earlier when we had all worked on the ranch together. But my older brother had graduated from high school and worked around the country, been in the Army. My younger brother and I worked different places, but for the first time in seven or eight years all of three of us were together. We actually jumped several fires together. My older brother, Bernie, left that fall of 1961 to join the Peace Corps, he spent two years in India. Larry continued to jump, he jumped, I believe, three seasons at Cave Junction and went to Alaska and jumped for seven seasons.

FC For BLM [Bureau of Land Management]?

GW BLM out of Fairbanks. I know written many letters to Three and a Half Mile Airport, Fairbanks.

FC Is he... is he still in the jumpers up there?

GW No, he... Larry had majored in physical education and was coaching and teaching, which he still does, which enabled him to jump during the summers and have a... continue with his teaching career.

FC But he jumped seventeen summers?

GW He jumped from the summer of 1960 to the summer of 1967, and
I think had a two year break where he went back and got his master's. The total jumper seasons was fifteen or sixteen. And he... after seven seasons in Alaska, when he was in his fifth... sixth... seventh year, he was one of the senior jumpers in Alaska. Then he came back and jumped out of Cave Junction until 1967.

FC Well, let's get into your jump years. If you can kind of work on it chronologically, starting out in 1960, what... what were the facilities as Cave Junction; and training--the incidents that stick out in your mind, and the first jumps, and... both timber and training jumps, and the type of training that you liked and some you might not have liked. Start discussing '60 season.

GW OK. The number... the summer of 1960, as I mentioned earlier, I had arrived at the Illinois Valley Airport, Cave Junction where the... what was then Tall Siskiyou smokejumpers were located. I started working just general flunkie work until the rest of the jumpers showed up. The next rookie jumper to arrive was a guy from White Plains, New York named Mike McCracken, who's a life-long friend of mine. And Mike got there about two days before training started and one thing that sticks out in my mind, Mike, they had him polishing one of the Twin Beeches. Just polishing out there just with the dust rag polishing the wing. A couple of guys showed up from Oklahoma, they were also rookies there for training, and they walked up there and looked at the plane, assumed Mike was the pilot. And they said... they asked him something about the plane and he said, "Oh, yeah. This baby will really get in a scoot." And the said, "No kidding!" They said, "We've never flown before." They said, "We just can't wait." He said, "I'll tell you what, boys, [laugh] as soon as I can get her polished up," he said, "y'all go get you a cup of coffee," he said, "we'll just go for a spin." They didn't find out until after... after supper, that evening, that he was a rookie also. But that was just typical of McCracken's personality. And McCracken became the, probably, all-time poison oak/poison ivy king of the Region-6. He'd... he could get poison ivy flying over a forest fire. He'd swell up like a bullfrog. He tried every cure know to man, from boiling oak bark and pouring the water over his body to his final--the McCracken solution--was a jug of Clorox and a wire brush.

FC What was his first name?

GW Mike.

FC Mike McCracken.

GW Mike's dad was a writer and editor for Reader's Digest, for years wrote the series of the "Cisco Kid." That was one thing that I could remember about McCracken, who is suppose to be here today--I don't know what happened to him.

GW The training, again there was eighteen of us, all different
parts of the country. A few of them had worked together on sub-
regions or forest districts, but for the most part all eighteen
of us... maybe somebody knew three people, but that was... I
didn't... I'd never met anybody there my first season. That was
the Summer of the song "Alley Oop" came out, and that became our
rallying cry, because of Cave Junction being the home of the cave
man. But our training, typically, was... the first couple weeks
was physical-type training with the running of the big loop,
which was about a three and a half mile loop around the airport
training facility, running the obstacle course each morning, a
lot of competitiveness built up on the group. We had a rope...
rope climb, which was about, probably, fifteen... twenty feet
hand over hand climbing, and that was one phase of the obstacle
course, coming around to the rope climb, climbing up, touch the
top, come back down. So then the next guy would come along, he'd
climb up, come back down, climb back up, come back down. The
next guy would come along: climb up, do ten pull-ups, come back
down, climb back up, and do ten more pull-ups, climb back down.
And it became a race between two or three of us to top each other
on the training.

Probably the most unique part of it for all of us, is
something I'd never seen before or since, it was unique to
smokejumping is the torture rack. Where at Cave Junction it was
concrete wall-type affair with a slot you stick your feet in and
two straps coming around the calf of your leg from which you did
d a back bend, touch your head on the ground and raise back up.
This was something that all of us enjoyed going back home,
telling people back... explaining to them.

FC That was depicted in the film, Red Skies of [sic] Montana,
as I remember, too.

GW Yeah, that's three of them I've probably seen fifteen times
on TV [television], I think my kids seen it now. And probably
was responsible for a lot of people going into smokejumping. It
glorifies the job and gives it a lot of publicity all over the
country.

GW Several of the training apparatus they had at Cave Junction
stick out in my mind. In addition to the obstacle course, we had
a... a trolley or slide affair that some ingenious person had
developed where they could hook you up backwards, sideways, or
forward and pull a lever and you would run down a track to a
point... to any point they could pull a cord and it would release
you at that point. You started out five... six feet above the
ground, you build up about a fifteen mile an hour ground speed,
and when they cut you loose you were going sideways it helped you
develop practice of keeping your feet together, hitting and
rolling, and getting off your feet, which was no problem on the
trolley--getting off your feet was the easy part of it. But...
they had a shock tower, which had two levels you jumped from
about fifteen feet and dropped down to your... harness on with
a... they had a nylon rope that caught you just before you hit
the net. And then one at about twenty five feet, which if... the
drag of the rope would make your decent fairly... slowed it down.
But the squad leaders at that time, Norm Powlowski, Fred Kramer...

FC Is he related at all to Pulaski the ranger?

GW No. This is a Powla... P-O... it's not P... I think Powlawski is...

FC P-O-L-S-K...

GW Yeah. This is P-O-W.

FC You mentioned Kramer?

GW Yeah, Fred Kramer.

FC Is he related to Al Kramer?

GW Uh...

FC Who was... who was at the session last night. He was jumping here in '43 on. And then BLM in Alaska.

GW Not to my knowledge, but Fred, he spelled his name K-R-A-M-E-R.

FC OK, a different one, then.

GW Fred was another jumper who had two had two brothers jumping, and there were three Kramer brothers then jumping at Cave Junction in '59, and then three Welches jumping there in '61.

FC Who's your base foreman?

GW Foreman was Al Boucher, the project air officer there was Jim Allen. We had a reunion in 1968 at Cave Junction which time I saw Jim Allen and El Boucher and five or six guys I had trained with that came back for that reunion.

FC What other type of training, besides the physical fitness, do you recall vividly?

GW Oh, they... we had a... in conjunction with our regular training, they had a fire school there, which they taught... they trained area fire people in addition to the smokejumpers. We were so caught up by that time in our physical training of the smokejumping part as well as anticipation of our first jump, that the week's fire training is just kind of a blur to me. I'd gone through a couple of them before, one in Idaho and one in Detroit, Oregon. So other than the heat, combustible material, and oxygen I... breaking down the fire, that's [laugh]...

FC The fire training.

GW The fire training week was not that impressive.
FC  How about your first aircraft ride and the first jump? You remember anything about yourself or any of your buddies at that time?

GW  Oh, yeah. The... they really prepped you up for that first jump. The day before we... they tied a plane down... Twin Beech down and had you get in the door of the plane, full jump gear with parachute and ran the props up so you got the feeling of the prop blasts, the roar of the engine, and had you actually exit the plane.

FC  And roll. And roll, too?

GW  Yeah, absolutely. They kept you... which we should have all figured out, the kept everybody back in the parachute loft where you couldn't see and brought you out one at a time to the plane so you couldn't see what happened. So what they were trying to do is emphasize on you the effect of the prop blast more than anything. But the... when you... when you exit the plane with those... the minute your feet hit the ground, which was, if you jumped in the proper jump position--you have a tight tuck with your feet together--you just rolled head over heels, just flip-flop down the...they had some... they had a couple jumpers standing back at the tail to keep you from hitting the tail. They didn't want to damage the plane, they didn't mind damaging the jumper. But that was the climax of jump week... the jump training. The next morning they got you up bright and early, they had rolls and coffee, and well, we took off probably at 6:00 in the morning for our first jump. We took up two planes, I was on the first plane jumping first.

FC  You're in Beeches, now... Twin Beeches?

GW  Twin Beeches, four jumpers. Another guy I trained with, named Bill Beardsley was in the second plane. We were the... each of us the first to jump out of our class. Which I don't know whether it was an honor or an experiment, but we made our first jump. I exited the plane, they had squad leaders on the ground with megaphones... bullhorns yelling instructions almost from the time you exited the plane. I think we jumped at about 2,000 feet, so we had a nice ride down.

FC  Can you pay... did you pay attention to the bullhorn?

GW  Yeah, I did, unfortunately. I was coming down... we were competitive in our class from the very beginning, and I never dreamed I'd hit anywhere but on the "X" they had marked on the field. And we were trying to maneuver the chutes down and they started yelling at me to assume a proper landing position, and I was trying to work my slots to turn my chute. I guess I was 300 or 400 feet off the ground when they practically gave me a last order to quit maneuvering my chute, which I did. And I ended up my hanging up my first jump in one, lone oak tree or some kind of a big, bushy type of tree. I hung up about four feet off the
ground, on my first jump.

FC No other tree in the meadow or the area?

GW So I still... after I had my first jump I had yet to experience a landing, doing a proper roll at the end of a jump. And at Cave Junction, we had a Smokejumper's Athletics Club, which they brought softball equipment and they had a series of fines: $1.00 for hanging up, $1.00 for getting your gear wet, $1.00 for... it was a $1.00 for hanging up when you weren't suppose to hang up, $1.00 for not hanging up on a timber jump, and $1.00 for not getting inside the fifty foot circle. They had about seven or eight... it was pretty hard to... $1.00 for not doing the proper roll. They could almost get you for a dollar or two on any jump.

FC And you got hit for most of them, huh?

GW Yeah. I guess if they wanted to get technical, they could get me $1.00 for hanging up, $1.00 for being outside the circle, $1.00 for not doing the proper roll when I hit the ground, and probably a couple bucks for something else.

[Interruption]

GW Floyd and I were just talking about the actual hanging up in the middle of Seat's Field (?) there at Cave Junction on my first jump. From the air I could tell, at least I was relatively certain from my brief experience, I was gonna hit that tree. And I was trying to maneuver it to get over nearer the spot we were suppose to be hitting anyway. But they had gone to work on me with the bullhorn, yelling at me to turn loose with my lines, assume the proper landing position, look... you know, look ahead at the 45 degree, look at the horizon and, you know, feet together. And they were just yelling and yelling by the numbers and, like I say, about 300 or 400 feet I finally just gave up and sailed, you know, just floated in like a sailboat. Looking back, it could be that they knew exactly where I was going and they wanted me on that tree.

[Interruption]

GW After we completed our set of jumps, which was a timber jump where we hung up, I remember one... one of the jumpers--it may have been Mike McCracken--hung up in the tree and there was a rattlesnake down below him. One of the jump foremen, Ken Rosenberg, came over and caught the snake, picked him up behind the head and carried him around for all the other jumpers to see him. It was a little, small timber rattler three... four feet long. But Mike being from White Plains, New York, any snake was big, and I think that was probably was his. The highlight of his timber jump was looking down at the snake.

FC As he was floating down?
Right. Shortly after we... or almost just immediately after we completed our set of jumps, they had a fire bust over in Eastern Oregon. And they took most of us... all the new jumpers over to La Grande, where they had a satellite base... in La Grande, Oregon. And we flew in there late one afternoon, rolled out our sleeping bags in and around the hangars there at La Grande, and they got us up about... well, first when we got in there, we rigged cargo chutes until about midnight, and we went to bed. They got us up about 4:00 the next morning. We started packing our gear, getting suited up, got on the plane, flew out. We made our first jump shortly after daylight that morning. There were four jumpers, I believe there were three of us were rookies and one jumper was two or three years of jump experience. We came back in... it was such a fire bust going, as soon as you got back, you went back out. And we got back in, I think, in about two days on that first jump. One on the third day. Again, they got us up about 4:00, we got all of our gear ready, loaded the plane, took off, as I remember it, before daybreak. It was just... there were so many fires that we'd just go out on patrols. They just jump you on a fire without it having been spotted by a lookout in some cases. The second fire, as I remember it, a jumper named Cecil Owen [inaudible], we call Owen... from Crabapple, West Virginia and I jumped. There's two rookies on the fire, it was a fairly large two man fire. We jumped the fire, got a line around the top of it. At some point brought our gear down, our paper sleeping bags and our meals... our fifteen pounds of canned food and set them at some point above the fireline which turned out to be a mistake, the fire got over the line, burned up our sleeping bags and our... all our rations. The only thing we had left to eat was the little ditty bag we carried with some baker's chocolate, and boxes of raisins in it, and maybe a little dried fruit. But we got a line around the fire, started mopping up. No sleeping bags, so we were on the fire all day the first day. The second day we were there twenty four hours. Third day we got back out, put the fire out, got it mopped up, got back into the jump station there at La Grande about 10:00 that night. All this I remember very well because when we got back to Cave Junction they called Owen [inaudible], I don't know why they didn't call me, but they called Owen in and they said, "Owen, we looked at your time you turned in." He said, "You got up at 4:00 the first morning, that out of twenty possible hours, you turned in nineteen. And on the second day, out of twenty-four possible hours, you turned in twenty three. And on the third day, out of twenty possible hours, you turned in nineteen." He said, "I want you to explain that." Owen said, "Well, old Tex and me," he said, "we knocked off an hour a day whether we need it the rest or not." [laugh] And that story got beefed up and embellished for quite some time around there. But we didn't have sleeping bags, we did have a job to do, and we did work. You couldn't sleep out in mosquitoes that were... had big mosquitoes, cold nights, we did pretty much what we turned in, worked the hours. The... in that same fire bust, about what was my third or fourth fire jump, a jumper named Dave Towers and I, Dave was from Tredian, Iowa, and Dave and I loaded on the plane with a... it was a C-47 about sixteen of us,
best of my recollection, loaded the plane. We flew out, again, on a... the type of fire bust where lightning had just worked over the ridge tops and there were fires everywhere. There was no problem finding the fires, just getting the jumpers out and figuring out how many to put on each fire. First jump, they jumped, I believe the jumpers were out of Okanogan in Washington, but two men jumped, we came back on the second pass and they had layed out a "Bar 4," I believe, the guy had broke his leg, whatever the designation is for that was. So they jumped in three other jumpers to help pack him out. And we continued jumping two... three men on various fires. [inaudible] I believe we were the last two on the plane. We flew over a little fire on a ridge top, they stood me in the door, this, again, is a C-47, we weren't sitting in the door, and I turned to Dave and we were always jacking around trying to stir each other up. I told... I turned to Dave, I said, "Towers," I said, "I got a feeling you're gonna get hurt on this jump." And he had a big old grin on his face, he said, "Oh, Tex! You just... you're always trying to get me... scare me." So we jumped. It was a freak fire, it was kind of a big clearcut, all slash, nothing but stumps and rocks and limbs to land on. So... was a couple of trees out there and Dave and I opted to hang up rather than hit in the stumps. I hung up, was in the process of making a let down... this was a fire that we jumped from the air, not knowing there were three or four people on the ground already on the fire. So I was hanging up trying to make a let down out of the tree, two guys come running over, he said, "Are you all right?" I said, "Yeah," I said, "let me make a let down, I'll be out of this tree in a second." And they said, "Your buddy hung up over here too," they said, "but he fell out and he hit like a sack of shit." And so I let down and went over there, found Towers, he had broke his foot (he did not know it at that time). Broke his foot, couldn't walk, remember that the first thing you're suppose to do when you got on the ground assess the situation and lay out a "L" or double-L. He crawled out, layed out a double-L, indicating all personnel OK. The plane wagged it's wings and flown on out.

FC Was this the second broke leg that...

GW Same day.

FC Same day? OK, go on.

GW Broke his leg and now broke his foot.

FC And then what happened?

GW So then we... I helped the three or four guys that were on the ground get line around the fire, got it under control, and I hiked out five or six miles to civilization. The guys that were on the ground, I don't know whether they were campers or what, they were just in there, but we managed to get a jeep and I led the jeep back in. It was a... having been logged over at one time, even though there was no distinctive road, if we ever get a jeep in there they'd take Towers out, and that ended his jump.
season for that summer. So on that... in that one day, we had a broken leg and a broken foot—two out of about sixteen jumpers.

[INTERUPTION]

GW Floyd was just talking about what we did between fires. Cave Junction, or [inaudible] Airport was famous, or infamously know as the Gobi, named after the Gobi Desert. But [inaudible] Valley Airport was just a stretch down through the valley with a unique little brown stone about the size of a hard ball, just millions of them. So especially for the rookies, if they didn't have a guard rail to paint, or a house to shingle, or a building to paint, or something constructive, they'd put you to digging Gobi stones. We had a volley ball field and a training area that had over the years been picked clean of the Gobi stones by our predecessors. But they'd give a couple men a wheel barrow and a pick, and they'd go out and pick Gobi stones for the wheel barrow load and wheel them out, and dump them, and come back and get another load. This is more busy work than anything, however, they did end up with a pretty nice little park there with a grassed in area that otherwise would have been rock through eternity. The various type of assignments they had... job assignments were the first year was wood cutting. We cut wood for all the permanent personnel for the winter. We would go out truck... flat-bed truck about three men with a chain saw and a mall and a wedge and we'd cut fire wood, basically trees three to four feet in diameter. We would cut off a poker chip-like end on it, split it up into fire wood, load it on the truck, bring it back down. For most of us, that was a kind of a choice assignment. It was a good physical conditioning type work, it was also productive. Gobi stones seemed a little bit degrading since you seemed to be producing anything. Fire wood, at least you could see the fruits of your labor. My second season, I was put in charge of the tool shed.

FC In 1961? Down in [inaudible].

GW Yeah, 1961, the year my two brothers came up. I was in charge of the tool shed, having worked out of the tool shed the year before. Tool shed, where they keep all the fire tools, they have... after any jump, all the shovels, and pulaskis, and axes, the saws that we used on the fire, come in, the jumpers bring them in, drop them in the bin and they're all sharpened to whatever extent they need to be before they're put back into fire packs. So we have a bin there, it might have twenty... thirty shovels in it, twenty... thirty pulaskis, different types of saws, and whatever. And my job was to either sharpen them or see that they were sharpened. But detail... they would detail, two or three men in the tool shed, we used... we also ran any projects that had been drawn up... working various types of construction. We ran sidewalks, especially the year my two brothers were there... we ran sidewalks, slabs, a lot of the hand mix concrete type construction. And that's one of the things I'm looking forward to when I leave here, I'm going over to Cave Junction to look at those bases. It's been closed since... when
I went back in '78 to the reunion, one of the concrete pipes I went... I put my... I put "Tex" and my initials in the thing and it was still there in '78, so I assume I can show it to my kids after twenty two years it should still be there. But the various other types of work: rigging cargo chutes, rigging fire packs. I was fortunate that two of the seasons I was there, '60 and '61, were very busy fire seasons and we were... and we spent a lot of time out on fires or out on satellite bases. We were... we flew to Missoula for a fire bust, spit a couple of cheers up in Okanogan in Washington, a couple of cheers over in La Grande in Oregon and a couple down in Redding, California.

FC You got on fires out of Missoula in '60, or was it in '61?

GW In '60 a group of Cave Junction jumpers came over and jumped out of Missoula. In '62, I came over, the first time I'd ever flown over, I came over on what was suppose to be a fire bust, but it rained or something happened. It was a dry run for us. There was, I think, about twenty of us flew over in a C-47 and turned right back around and flew back to Cave Junction.

FC You didn't drop on any fires, then, in Missoula?

GW Not... no. I never jumped on any fires out of Missoula. I jumped out of Winthrop, Washington; Redding, California; and La Grande, Oregon; as well as Cave Junction.

FC What are some of the fires that you dropped on in '61 that you remember?

GW Two fires I can remember very well. One fire, we left Cave Junction, again, in a twin engine Beechcraft and flew from Cave Junction down to Mount Lassen National Forest in Northern California. It was about a four hour plane ride, if I remember right, and we were on a little, small fire on a ridge top. A jumper named Chuck Sheeley, who is here at the reunion... Chuck Sheeley and I were on, the pilot was using his altitude, we were... I do remember we jumped without a... we jumped a number of fires without maps or compasses, because we'd be on a fire bust and they'd run out, they'd just put you in the door and they'd... just before you'd jump, they'd say, "OK, when you get out, you get a bearing, there's a road three ridges over to the north. As soon as you get on the ground, you put your arrow down there, because when you get the fire out, that's the way you're gonna have to get out." And this is one of those type deals, the fire was reported by a look out and plotted wrong. We were given the wrong coordinates when we jumped the fire, and down there, it's a solid manzanita brush. But we jumped, as I was saying...

[END OF SIDE A]

[BEGIN SIDE B]

GW ...we got on the ground. Sheeley and I both commented the
short time we were in the air, so later when we got back, we talked with the pilot and the spotter, and they agreed that they calculated the altitude from the valley and not the ridge top. And it very possible that we did jump at something around 500 feet. Probably we jumped at 1,000 feet above where we hit, from where we went out, but it a little bit amount of drift and a very steep ridge, we probably traveled 300 feet laterally and 500 feet down or something along those lines. But we put the fire out, again, there was supposed to have been a... where they told us we were, we tried to orient the map by recognizable terrain features using Lassen Peak and some other recognizable peak. But in a forest that size, or in a wasteland that size and as far as we could see, it was easily gonna be a few kilometers off at that distance. But we left the fire, started hiking out about Noon one day, by 6:00 I had... my Levis were absolute shreds and my legs were scratched from the top of my boots to my crotch. Literally, my Levis were just absolutely torn to pieces. We'd take two steps forward and one back fighting our way through that manzanita brush. And we got over the ridge where the road was supposed to be and there was no road. We had no idea where we were so we decided the best thing was to go back where... to the fire. We slept in our parachutes that night because had a... thought we were within a few hours of being out of there, and left our paper sleeping bags.

FC What forest was this on?

GW This was in Northern California, it was...

FC Lassen?

GW ...I think it was Mount Lassen... Lassen National Forest was the name of it. We... we got part way back to the... where the fire had been that night, slept in our parachutes, which wasn't the first time I had done that. And the next morning, got up, got back to the fire, assuming that they would come looking for us. Like I said, we had... we hadn't just casually strolled over the hill, we had fought that brush for seven or eight hours. And had gone a couple of miles further than the map indicated the road was supposed to be. So we were smart enough by that time to know that we weren't where we thought we were. And we couldn't think of any better solution, so we went back to the fire... the fire site. The next morning, a helicopter was in the area, we had a signal mirror and we picked that sucker up probably five miles away with the mirror, flashing it, and we kept it right on that cockpit until finally he almost went crazy, we were blinding the pilot. And he started maneuvering back and forth, back and fourth to let us know that he had picked us up and get the mirror out of his face. So they came in, hovered over us, told us to come up to a certain point on the hill where they could set down. And we hiked up to the top of the hill and the took us out. The district ranger was on the helicopter.

FC Well, had a copter been dispatched to pick you up?
GW No. He was just out...

FC Just observation?

GW Yeah. They didn't know there were a jumper in the area. And there was no question that the lookout had plotted the fire about three clicks off, or three kilometers off from where it actually was and when the ranger found out, he got the coordinates from my record, and when he looked coordinates and where we were, he indicated that that lookout had a lot of explaining to do.

FC You were pretty lucky to have the mirror.

GW Yeah, yeah. We had one. That was standard, at least in my ditty bag it was standard.

FC Then what happened after? Were you able to get a ride back to...?

GW Yeah, they flew us out to a ranger station and they got us a truck out. I think they... we ended back in Redding, but we... as I mentioned earlier, we had flown directly out of Cave Junction all the way down there. But... then the second jump that comes to mind, not the second jump of the season, but the last jump of the season for me was August 8th, 1961. There was a fire there on the Siskiyou, I believe the only fire I ever jumped on the Siskiyou. It was only a few miles from the Cave Junction smokejumper project, but a jumper by the name of Dick Board and three other jumpers had jumped what had been determined a four man fire ten or fifteen miles from Cave Junction on the Siskiyou. And so they called in for help. They sent my older brother, Bernie, and I in on the resupply and as it was not uncommon, we had a bet as to who could get the closest to the fire without getting in the fire... who could get closest to the fire line on coming in. They always let us pick our drop site, or where we're gonna jump and...

FC Your spotter didn't do that?

GW They would... the would... from the air, they would let you... at least Cave Junction they were fairly lenient in that direction. If there was a meadow a quarter mile away, they give you the choice of going into the meadow... a half a mile, or whatever or into the trees by the fire. Since the majority of our jumps were in the trees, the... you know, trees, to us, was just standard operational procedure, so we'd just normally go into the trees rather than have to fight back up a hill or across a ridge a quarter mile to get to the fire. So we'd... we'd pick drop sites just down wind from the fire which was in the trees. And the spotter put us out in position to get there. There was a little bit of breeze, so I fought the breeze and I got right over the fire and fought the breeze or the wind so I could just make a turn and get on down wind of the fire. At the last minute just outside the fireline, poor calculation just about a couple
hundred feet above the fire where I would have normally have... or maybe 300... 400 feet above the fire, where I normally would have headed off, the wind died. And I was just dead in... dead air above the fire, for the ridge... the ridge top screened it off. So in an attempt to get out of the fire, and not having the wind that I thought I was gonna have, I restuck... grabbed both risers and pulled them down to about my knees. I started pulling the slip to pick up some lateral speed... er, lateral movement to get it... get out of the fireline. I was still in a full slip when I crossed the fire line, I hit the first tree out-side the fireline. But by having the risers pulled down as I did, that kicked me out away from the center of the chute so that when I hit the tree, and the tree being cone shaped, I hit on a limb, hung up, my chute fell down... didn't drape across the top of the tree, just fell down. And when the weight of the chute dropped down below me, plus putting my full weight on the limb, the limb broke. I fell, what the calculated forty-three... which was a long time. I thought about a lot of things.

FC You bouncing off a couple limbs coming down?

GW Yeah, bounced off a couple limbs. I was coming down through them, but I was way out on the tips so that just a, you know, it wasn't something that'd break the fall that much, because it was just the leafy end of the limb. But anyway, as I remember it, my life kind of passed before me in that forty foot fall seemed like it must have taken at least thirty seconds. But I hit, and when I hit it was on a... it was about a 45 degree slope, which helped to break my fall. My feet came over my head... I hit on my shoulders, my feet came over my head and mashed absolutely every drop of breath out of me, which was the worst of the whole thing. I couldn't breath, I couldn't get my breath, the other jumpers that were already on the fire had seen what happened. We had a couple other jumpers hurt already.

FC On the same fire?

GW Not on the same fire, but within a week. And so they came running over and so after I got my breath I decided I was all right, but I let them go ahead and take care of my chute and get me out of my hot uniform and jump suit. Then got up, decided I was all right. We mopped... put the fire out, mopped it up. That was on like a Thursday when we jumped, we got the fire out on about a Friday, packed out. Saturday morning, by the best of my recollection, they to me into the hospital in Grant's Pass for an x-ray, I was having some back pain. And they did the x-ray, but the radiologist was out playing golf or bridge, or something and wouldn't be back until the next day to read the x-rays. So I went back into Cave Junction and was working the tool shed, what I believe was Sunday, and they wanted to come to the phone. I talked to the radiologist and he wanted to know how I was feeling and I said, "Fine." And he said, "Could you come into the hospital?" And I said, "Sure." He said, "How are you gonna get there?" And I said, "I guess I'm gonna drive." And he said, "Well, you better have somebody drive you so that... we're
probably gonna have to keep you a while." I got in the hospital, I walked in the emergency room, they had me sit down, fill out all the forms, asked me all the questions. As soon as signed my name on the entrance exam, they slapped me on a gurney flat on my back, and for eighteen days kept me flat on my back in the hospital. I had what they diagnosed as a "mild compression of the number sixth, seventh, eighth vertebrae." But that ended my jump season for 1961. I spent three weeks in the hospital... or eighteen days, got out the latter part of August, the fire season is close to over, anyway. But I... my two brothers were staying up there. Larry stayed up and worked the Fall, and my older brother stayed up and went directly from there to the Peace Corps. I had my car up there, so Mike McCracken, who's going back to New York agreed to drive me from Cave Junction, Oregon to Post, Texas and then catch a plane out of Lubbock to... back to New York. So that's what I did for the next three or four days, ride in the car.

FC But you were in the hospital for a couple weeks in traction and...?

GW I was eighteen days in the hospital, no traction, just put me... put a board under my bed and kept me in there. They had me doing exercises almost from the start. In my association with several radiologists and whatever over the recent years, they say that type of injury now would probably not require any bed rest. Now they determine... you know, they just slap a brace on you and let you go because a compression is not like a... just a spiral twist or something where the vertebrae...

FC Well, that kind of ended your '61 season. What... what do you think about when you're flying to a fire?

GW Of course, it seemed like most fires that I was on, it seemed like it was always more than one fire and you were looking down at various fires that other people were going out on or other people were already down on. But, of course, I guess the thing you think about... in by retrospect, the think I thought about most was the type of fire it was gonna be: how hot it was gonna be, how fast it was gonna be moving, and... after the first jump, the actual jump itself, I enjoy jumping, I think most jumpers do. And... see... if I could jump every day that's what I would have done. But... so the anticipation of the jump was not there, it more the thinking about what type fire it was, how it was gonna be, how quick we could get it out and get back and get another jump.

FC You were... you were site seeing also, and the type of topography you're heading and types of fuel and timber.

GW Right. Because in a... in the Twin Beech we flew with the door open... no door on and you could just sit right there with your head out the door, which is basically what we'd do it. Usually a couple of us were just back there hanging our head out and looking at the terrain. It was... jumping, to me, was like
competitive athletics. It was a job but it was also something we wanted to do well and we wanted to do often. And if it was a big fire we'd calculated how long it'd take to get a ground crew in to start mopping up so we could get out. Mop up was kind of the dreg part of the job, something that had to be done, but if they could get a ground crew in to do it, that was... that was better for us. We wanted... what we determined the highlight, or the hero end of it was to get in and stop it [inaudible] and contain it, and then go onto the next one.

FC Well, you have anything other... might stick out in the '61 season, or should we get into the '62 season, which wasn't that hot a fire season?

GW Yeah, '6--...

[INTERRUPTION]

FC What about recreational facilities at Cave? What'd you do in your off hours?

GW Well, we had, in addition to the obstacle course, which we actually got out and ran during the off hours also, we had volleyball, which we... some mornings in lieu of the regular physical training, we'd play volleyball. We had our own brand of "jungleball," it was called and jungleball was where the ball does not have to go off of a rebounding surface as in volleyball. It was more like a sticky game of handball the way it was played at Cave Junction. And if you could go up and get both hands on the ball and throw it like a baseball, that was a... that was fair game. But we had some very competitive games of volleyball, we played in a fast pitch and a slow pitch league there in Cave Junction, and one week we'd have the best team in the state and the next week we'd have a fire bust and we wouldn't have a pitcher, or half of the outfield or infield would be gone, and we'd have to scrounge up a crew to even have a team. So I don't remember us ever finishing very high in the league, but it was a lot of fun, it gave us something to look forward to in the evenings. Also there was a... at Cave Junction there is what is known as Oregon Caves National Monument, which is a cavern up about eighteen miles above Cave Junction and to the best of my memory they [cough] employed about fifteen to twenty college students, most of which were female. And I remember my rookie season, they had problems with the smokejumpers and a few guys that worked up at Oregon Caves the year before... or a couple years before. So they had warned us about public relations and whatever, but we organized a mixer with the... had a square dance with the female employees up at the Oregon Caves National Monument, and for the next three seasons that I was there, that became a regular stop for all... or most of the jumpers was we had a fifteen or so college girls working up there and they were kind of isolated and we were kind of isolated so we took them swimming at the Forks, Forks is a swimming hole where the Applegate and Illinois Rivers merge there just out of Cave Junction. Well that was about the extent of our social life in
Cave Junction was volleyball and running up the the cave women.

FC You called them the "cave women?"

GW Cave women, that's all. [inaudible]

FC How about the 1962 fire season, then?

GW '62 was a zero year for me. I had been in R.O.T.C. and so I had a six week summer camp to go through that summer, and I was scheduled to go to summer camp at Fort Sill, Oklahoma with the rest of my R.O.T.C. compadres at Texas Tech. And since I was going to be in Cave Junction, Oregon and they had a R.O.T.C. Summer camp in Fort Lewis, Washington I assumed that that would be the logical thing for me to do, just to go to Fort Lewis, especially since they were only gonna pay me mileage from my hometown of Post, Texas to Fort Sill, Oklahoma, which is about 350 miles, and I was gonna have to drive about 2,000 miles back from Cave Junction to Fort Sill. And I talked with them over at the R.O.T.C. building about the possibility, and they just said, "No way!" But being young and dumb, I wrote a letter to the Fourth Army requesting... explaining my situation and not only did they send me to Fort Lewis, Washington, they paid me mileage from Post, Texas to Fort Lewis, Washington. I think I got a nickel a mile, each way is 2,400 miles and that is almost equal to what I drew for my six weeks Summer training there at Fort Lewis. But that was... that six weeks, which was about in the middle of June to the first of August was about the extent of our fire bust and I did not get a fire jump my third jump season. I think I made four practice jumps, two when I got there and two later in the year.

FC So... so in '62 you had no fire jumps outside of Fort Lewis, you had primarily project work, then?

GW Right. Of course that was, you know, had twelve... thirteen weeks, just worked out that way. Probably the most unusual thing that happened in '62, was Gary and I were at the Seattle World's Fair and we were... two or three other of the cadets and I had gone up to the World's Fair and were walking around there and... at the World's Fairgrounds in Seattle and ran into two smokejumpers from Cave Junction that had been on a fire bust up in Winthrop in Okanogan.

FC Do you remember their names?

GW Chuck... Charlie Mosley is the one I remember the best. Charlie was a track star from Auburn in Alabama. He rushed at Auburn... Auburn University and besides the fact that I had worked with Charlie for those two seasons and were good friends, we played baseball together, and ran around together in the evenings, the thing I remember Charlie the most about, when I was stationed at Fort Benning, the University of Alabama and Auburn had a track meet and Mosley, who had been training for the Olympics at that time, set three or four Southern Conference...
records in track. He had participated in '61 at the N.C.A.A. [National Collegiate Athletic Association] track meet at the University of Oregon, which I watched, and I think Charlie placed about seventh in the long jump... the broad jump, and about the same--sixth or seventh--in the intermediate hurdles.

FC Well, you met them at the Fair, then?

GW Yeah, just by accident, you know, that's a big place. Just walking along and there they are. They had just been up on a fire bust and had got a weekend off, or it may have rained, I don't remember what, somehow they had gotten down to Seattle to the World's Fair. We happened to run into them. My... both... let's see, my younger brother Larry was also jumping at Cave Junction that Summer and they had a pretty good jump season. During that six weeks they had... they got a lot of jumps, but just happened to be the six weeks I was gone. And got back and as it turned out, my last fire jump was the one I got hurt on in 1961. One thing I did not... I was talking earlier about my military, the fact that they would not let me go to jump school because I was color blind. After I got out, they did finally get that removed and I stayed in the Reserves for ten years after I got off active duty. I went back down when I was twenty six years old in 1966 and went through jump training at Fort Benning in August of '66. And it was super hot down there in Georgia that time of year. I went through jump training there, starting all over, just like a rookie. And made about five jumps there and stayed in Reserves, made another thirty something jumps in Reserves over the next five years or six years.

FC How about the jumping training here, did that help you much with the Fort Benning?

GW Oh, Fort Benning! You know, I got nothing but respect for the smokejumper training. You come out of smokejumper training you not only know how to exit an aircraft, and how to hit and roll, you know a lot about your chute, you know how to it maneuvers. The Army's not interested in teaching any of that, they're jumping 600 people at once. The last thing they want is somebody up there maneuvering a chute going into somebody else. They want to to drift...

FC Go straight down.

GW Go with the flow.

FC Yeah.

GW And so they... basically the training up there was just over and over exit and roll, exit and roll. They use a... actually probably jump training as a smokejumper was detrimental because they use a parachute landing fall, where we use what we call an Allen roll. And where we turned and pivotted and went from the balls of our feet to our rump and brought our feet over our head and did a complete flip, the Army used the parachute
landing fall, you hit on the balls of your feet, outside of the calf of your leg, your buttoc, what they call your push-up muscle, and your latisimus dorsi, or whatever it is, behind your back, and you just kind of collapse on your side, as opposed... with a slight roll on your back. You end up on your... on a PLF in the Army when you land on your side and back.

FC  PLF? What's that?

GW  Parachute landing fall.

FC  OK.

GW  That's what the Army termed it, where, like I say, we called it, in Oregon anyway, an Allen roll. But that aspect of it... I did go ahead, I was in a special forces reserve unit went to the Special Forces Warfare Center at Fort Bragg, went to the Special Forces Jumpmaster's School at Fort Bragg. So the... the Special Forces jumped steerable chutes, so when I got into that part of it, it was a much more enjoyable, a lot better situation than what...

FC  More like smokejumping?

GW  More like smokejumping, right. We jumped with, you know, shoot for our target... for our spot and maneuvered chutes.

FC  Do you recall any of the pilots down in Cave Junction?

GW  John Childers was a pilot there, for, I believe, all three years. And Dick Foley was a pilot there the first couple years, I'm not sure whatever happened to... I believe his first name was Dick, Foley I'm sure of. He and his wife lived up there on the base.

FC  Did they have any particular personality traits that you remember them?

GW  Easy going. Easy going. [laugh] I know Foley used to get out there and sit in the shade and watch us run in the evening. Of course, we were twenty-one... twenty-two years old, it's kind of hard... boy, I guess Bobby was twenty five... six... or seven and seemed like an old man to us at the time, awful young now. But he just shake his head as we ran out there and he told us, you know... of course, he was... he had a little bit of a roll on his belt by that time, and he told us that he used to run and try to keep in shape and he did that for several years and he decided to let it go and let it all hang out. And he and John Childers, the other pilot, probably the two guys... the only two guys on the whole project who didn't get out and workout every afternoon.

FC  John Childers--the name is familiar to me. I'm not sure, maybe the same one or not. Is he... who was he working for?

GW  He was flying out of Cave Junction. I don't know what
his... I know during the Winters, I talked with John, he did some seeding programs for the Forest Service. Where they... you know, aerial reseeding.

FC Did he do any flying in Region-1?

GW Possibly. Not to my knowledge, but he sure may very well have. John was probably... it's kind of hard at age twenty... twenty-one... twenty-two to judge their ages, being about a generation older than you. John was probably around forty years old at that time in the early '60s. And had a lot of hours flying, I know in talking with him. And, like I said, during the Winter I know he did a lot of reseeding programs on watersheds that'd burned over or whatever, I think down in California. So I'm sure he probably... possibly flew for the Forest Service in other regions....

FC What kind of a person would want to become a smokejumper?

GW Well, I got two kids that want to be smokejumpers. They are both very athletic, very outgoing, almost hyper[active], but I think people that... you know, they want to get involved, they want to do something, maybe a little out of the ordinary. But it has a certain appeal from the adventure standpoint. Maybe, to some people, it's a chance to prove something to themselves or to other people. But I'd say, to the majority of them, it's just a challenge that they don't want to let go unanswered. I, probably, credit smokejumping as one of three or four experiences that helped shape my life for whatever good has come of it.

FC Can you elaborate on how it shaped your life?

GW It game me a... no question that I came back from my first year of jumping with a lot more self-confidence than I had had up to that time. However, in talking to some of my contemporaries, that was never one of my problems. I was always, probably, over confident, but it helped me relate to other people, you know, I had no hesitation or reservations about what I could or could not do. I had, I guess, at that time proven to myself that I could do about anything I wanted to do. And the actual, you know, the jumps... fire time, you're out on a fire and you're out in the boondocks and people or it's one on one or a rap session or whatever, you're gonna... you get into a lot of bull session or jump stories. I don't know whether you want this on tape, somebody's bound to have told you the difference between a fairy tale and a jump story.

FC You could do whatever you want. I'd like to hear, but go ahead.

GW The difference between a fairy tale and a jump story: the fairy tale starts out "once upon a time," and the jump story starts out "now this ain't no shit." [laugh] And that's where the difference ends. But talking, yesterday they were taking pictures of the '60s jumpers and I ran into Mike Simon, a guy I trained with who I have not seen for twenty-two years. Mike
teaches and lives in Luxemburg City in Germany, he's been in Europe now for twenty years teaching with the Department of Defense. I ran into Chuck Sheeley who trained a year ahead of me and jumped several fires with me and my brother Larry, who trained a year behind me. And a guy named Charley Crowley out of Athens, Georgia who trained with me and I hadn't seen him since the first year we trained, he didn't come back after the first year. Good jumper.

FC You met them at the reunion last night?

GW Met them all at the reunion last night. We got to talking about the '60s jumpers and we decided that was the probably the high point of smokejumping history was the '60s. And I'm sure the '70s and the '50s are gonna take exception, but we decided, you know, first of all we could hardly all get in the picture there, it seemed to be the most people from that era were here.

FC It was pretty great to have this reunion.

GW Oh, yeah.

FC As far as I'm concerned. What... when should they have the next one, if they ever do?

GW I don't know, I certainly think that five years should be long enough to wait. I'd probably come back in five years. I wouldn't come back in one year, I might come back in two, I'd probably have a kid working up here somewhere in the Northwest next Summer. If he he has anything to say about it, he'll be up. And a couple weeks later... years later I got my sixteen year old, like I said early, he'd jump tomorrow if somebody'd give him a chute, so I'm sure he'd be coming up. So I would probably come up without question in two to three years, certainly within five years I'd like to come back. Seeing... we're talking... you know, there's probably little doubt in our mind that in the early '60s... late '50s and early '60s the mountains were taller, the trees were higher, the rivers were deeper. You know, things have changed, but as we remember it, it was probably the all-time highlight of our experience. It was probably the one job that was not a job that I've ever done. I would probably have jumped free if I could have lived otherwise. I had to have the money and I... no question, the money was very possibly responsible for me getting a college education. I probably would have found another way, but with the money I made jumping, especially with two good fire seasons, I was able to buy a car, graduated from college, didn't owe a dime, I had $600.00 in the bank and most of my friends owed several thousand dollars or didn't get out. So I credit smokejumping with being responsible for a lot of good things that happened to me.

FC You mentioned that you were a blister ruster on the Kaniksu in 1957 at the old CCC camp--Camp Boswell--and you talked about Clem Wallace, any incidents that tie in with jumpers, you remember any fellows from those days?
GW I remember several fellows from those days. One guy when I went to Fort Lewis, Washington summer camp they had a physical combat efficiency test up there and out of 1,189 cadets who took the test, I finished fourth and he finished either third or fifth, because they honored the top five. But he was just out of high school as I was that summer at... up in Camp Boswell. And I suppose we would have gone the whole summer at Fort Lewis with that, with almost 1,200 cadets up there without seeing each other. If it hadn't have been for the fact that we both ended up at the ceremonies, and it had been a... that was the summer of '62, so it was a good five years since I worked with him. But I never saw another one of the guys I worked with in Camp Boswell. I assume if any of them went into jumping they probably went to either McCall or Missoula and I ended up over in Oregon.

FC But there was no one in that camp that...?

GW No one in that camp became a jumper, to my knowledge.

FC Yeah. How about... well, you mentioned about the rattlesnake incident. Did you have any other wildlife experiences, or any experiences with wildlife?

GW Well, it seemed like the wildlife all headed away from the fire. Probably most of the wildlife we experienced on a jump was in town after we hiked out of the fire. But we use to enjoy hiking out... we'd pack out usually to some very small community and we'd wear our jump jackets with our collars... big, old white collars and big old white jackets. That was the only jacket we'd have, it was cool and nice. We'd wear the jackets around town, it was kind of like a letter jacket to the local girls, we'd get a lot of mileage out of the jackets from just the attraction of them. We'd go into the local bars and generally they'd buy us... you know, we were kind of like a professional athlete to them. And as long as... it either ended up in a fight or them buying us a beer, one... one or the other: they either didn't like jumpers or the loved them. But we'd get in just to stir things up we'd have some fake arm wrestling. My brother and I both had a hard time beating each other, but we didn't lose many arm wrestling matches. We'd get in a bar... and I remember [inaudible] and I were in a bar one night and I'd let him beat me a couple time, you know, of course then the crowd gathers around and they want to wrestle with the champion. He'd say, "Nah, you got to beat Tex first. You beat him, then you can arm wrestle me." And I got overloaded myself a couple times. I got in a guy that was supposedly the champ... arm wrestling champion of the Northwest, which I think included Washington, Oregon, and Idaho. And we was a fireman out of Eugene, Oregon but other than that I generally managed to wrap their knuckles and get a free beer here and there. But from the air we saw a couple bear running running across a meadow, but on a fire, I never saw anything wilder than a squirrel, I don't suppose.

FC Let's talk a little bit about your personnel at Cave
Junction. You mentioned Jim Allen, what about him?

GW Jim Allen. I was thinking on the way up here... driving up from Texas, which we drove 2,300 miles to get here coming through Yellowstone. But since having my military career, dealing with people, my five years as a bank examiner dealing with different people every week, and then my years in banking and having, since 1979, been president and owner of the bank I'm in, First State Bank in Riesel, having to deal with people, personnel problems, Jim Allen was probably as good of a personnel administrator as I've met in my life. He was dealing with a type people: super active, aggressive-type personalities, people that were probably a little more self-motivated and self-centered than your average person. And Jim could just... he could just manage all this just perfect. I had nothing but respect for Jim. The way he handled situations and people... there were situations where it was obvious, maybe, that someone was gonna be fired or they'd done something that they shouldn't have done, they knew they shouldn't have done it, everybody they shouldn't have; Jim could take that and turn it around, salvage a good jumper out of the deal and make a friend for life just by... just the easy way he had of handling things. But there was never any doubt who was in charge, or who ought to be in charge.

FC What's... what's he doing now, do you know?

GW Jim retired from... he was over in Redmond, and he had just... he was getting ready to retire or retired when we had our reunion in '78. He's living over in Redmond, Oregon, to the best of my knowledge.

FC He retired from the Forest Service?

GW Retired from the Forest Service, and he's playing golf back then reg... as often as he could. Jim had four daughters, I believe, who were at various ages as we were working there and, you know, they remember us probably better than we remember them because there was four of them and it was kind of hard to remember which one was which. I know at the reunion when we went back in '78 a couple of them were there and they had a real nice family. One thing I remember about Jim, on my thirteenth jump we jumped on a Umatilla National Forest into a bunch of doug fir and I hung up way up at the top of a tree, didn't know how high I was up. We had a 150 foot let down rope, I tied into the risers in my chute, dropped my rope, was fixing to let down--I couldn't see through the limb--and Owen [inaudible], who happened to be on that jump with me, yelled, "Tex! Tex! Don't come down!" He said, "You're rope doesn't reach!" I was hung up almost 200 feet up in the top of one of those doug fir. I had to climb down about forty or fifty feet tie into a limb on the tree, make my let down, put the fire out, come back, climb back up the tree with another... with an additional let down rope, tie it onto the... one of the risers, and come down and pull it out of the tree. I got back to the base, I was telling Jim Allen about it and I'm sure I may be off a jump or two or a year a two, I was
telling him about my thirteenth jump hanging up two hundred feet; Jim said, "I remember my thirteenth jump. I was nineteen years old and I jumped into the Normandy beachhead." There I was, twenty-two at the time, it really made an impression the fact that a guy a couple... three years younger than me had... was involved, probably most of them at that age. But Jim was an excellent manager of people and administrator and I've had nothing but respect for him all my life.

FC What incidents in your smokejumper career stick out... this is beyond what you've already discussed?

GW It's hard to nail down any one thing, I guess, that sticks out. The overall experience and the lifetime friends that I have from jumping, even though I rarely ever see them now. Scattered around the country, we still communicate periodically, but...

Floyd, that... that about wraps it up. That's the things that come to mind at this moment. I'm sure that a lot of other things will hit me tonight or tomorrow and looking back it... at the time it was probably the absolute highlight of my life and for several years after I jumped, it was the focal point of my life. It was the thing I looked back on, you know, what I identified with, you know, that's what I am, or that's what I was. At age forty-five, I'm talking about something I did when I was half my age, things become a little dim. Of course, things I... as I remember them, still nothing... nothing negative about the whole job. One of the few jobs I've had I can say that.

[END OF INTERVIEW]