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RG This is an interview with Rhett Wise on July 22nd, 1984 at my apartment during the smokejumper reunion. The interviewer is Renee Gouaux. I'd like to first start out by asking Rhett, what attracted him to smokejumping?

RW The excitement, travel, seeing the country, and the money. [laugh] So, that was the basic things.

RG Uh-huh. How did you find out about smokejumping?

RW Oh, I suppose when I was raised in Ohio and reading books on the outdoors, being as I was interested in outdoor work. And when I came to the university, I lived across the hall from two smokejumpers that were, like, seniors, so that more or less started it. And read a lot of books and stuff like that.

RG Had you worked for the Forest Service before you became a smokejumper?

RW Yeah, I was on a lookout one summer. And we have to get so much experience first. I was on fire lookout one summer in the Bob Marshall, and one season as a timber aide up at Whitefish [Montana] for the Forest Service, and then I think the third season I jumped.

RG You were a forestry major in school?

RW Yes.

RG What years did you smokejump?

RW OK. I jump out of Missoula, first year was 1961. And then 1962 I was a jumper [inaudible] though I spent most of the summer at Whitefish in timber work and then came down here when they had a fire bust. And then after graduation from the service, I had came back and jumped in 1969 in a Forest Service crew that went to Alaska. In 1970 I worked... had a job in Missoula as a smokejumper loadmaster, and that was the last year I jumped.

RG What exactly does a smokejumper loadmaster do?

RW OK. The way this one is set up, we would... another person, Bill Boles, which had a lot more experience than I did in it. We were kind of co-foremen on the air cargo in Anchorage District. And we would set up all the equipment and have it rigged... we'd have other people rig it for us for cargo dropping to fire fighters on the ground. And if a need arose why we would also go out and jump. But in 1970, it was a wet year in Anchorage and, as I say, Bill had a lot more experience and he stayed on more or less as taking care of cargo while I went ahead and went out to the western area and jumped. But that was air cargo and we also
point the point cargo. You'd load various types of aircraft with cargo that was going straight out to another Forest Service... not Forest Service, BLM [Bureau of Land Management] base out in the west or up north. And you load it in Anchorage and you unload it out there and make it go to another base. You do the same thing, you haul fuel for helicopters and various things like that. So it was dropping air cargo, hauling point to point cargo and then also, if we need arose, we'd jump. And then in 1970, both Bill and I came down to... with about ten other BLM jumpers that came down to Montana and Oregon and made some jumps, and they had a big fire bust that year. So we came down here.

RG How did your parents feel about your decision to become a smokejumper?

RW Well, see, I was out here at that time going to school, so I wasn't in contact with them too much. I don't thing it bothered them too much. They didn't know too much about it. My mother, she was always worried about getting hurt and stuff like that, but they didn't know too much about it, and I just went ahead and did it. [laugh]

RG What kind of training did the smokejumper organization give you before you made your first jump?

RW OK. I have... I think it was four weeks of training, now this was in Missoula, starting out with a lot of class work stuff and a lot of physical training. And being everybody's around eighteen to twenty-one, at that time they were a lot younger and most of them were college students and in pretty good shape if you were involved in outdoor stuff [inaudible] to qualify, anyway. And then you had various units where you would learn how to jump out of an airplane in the right position and how you were supposed to land and then roll to get off your feet. And equipment, if you landed in a tree, there was a special way you could let yourself down so they have a system out there where you would pull it up on some pulleys with your uniform set up for let down... we called it a let down, and then you would have to in a certain time period let yourself down on the ground, or else you'd hang there [laugh] for a while as they talk to you. And you went off a shock tower which simulated the opening shock of parachute opening. And they had another... I don't know what it's called, I think it's just an A-frame out there that you can haul it up in the air and they let you go. You'd be on a cable and you'd come down the cable and you'd have to hit and push and roll, you didn't have any choice that way. [laugh] Oh, and then that went on for two... two and a half weeks and then you make seven practice jumps. I think you make eight now, we made seven then. Usually you'd go out in an open... a large open meadow... can't remember the name of them up there now and make your practice jumps while you got all these supervisors and stuff watching you and grading as you're coming down. You have a target there that you're supposed to try to hit, and I think the last one usually was up at Nine Mile area where they just... they dropped you in there it was all trees and your... normally you'd
end up in a tree so you'd have to... you'd know what it was like to come in and hit a tree like you're supposed to hit with your feet right over the apex of the tree and then make sure you're hung up in the tree and go through your let down procedure. So that was the practice for that. That's pretty much all of that, I guess.

RG Did you feel that you were well prepared before you made your first jump?

RW Oh, yeah. Yeah, they had... I think we had a big group in 1961 crew, of course, there were a lot of them at the reunion. We had a really good squad leaders and I think we were broken up into five squads and they were all older guys, they had a lot of experience and really good. And sort of like most of them were ex-veterans and stuff... paratroopers, marines, or something like that so there was a lot of that type of training involved with it. And they were all... if you fouled up or something like that, like when you went off the jump tower, you were supposed to count one, two, three, four and that's when you spread... you can look up and spread your risers and make sure... in those days make your canopy... make sure he canopy was open. If you forgot to count, which a lot of people did, you had to do so many push-ups; if you did it again, you had to do so many more push-ups. So that was kind of the discipline thing out there. If you fouled up some way why they were always on you to do it right. They were, you know, they were all good. Good training, I don't think you could beat it.

RG Do you remember your first jump?

RW Oh, yeah, sure.

RG Can you tell me what it was like? What it felt like?

RW OK. This is a kind of a sad one in a way, but it's a... kind of a unique one. '61 was a starting of an early fire season so they got us through about three days early... three or four days early. And I don't know... remember if the... I guess you weren't there last night but St. Pat's used to be... had a lot of nurses and they were always coming back and forth dating and stuff. That night we had a graduation party, somewhere on the other side of Pattee Canyon... beer bust type of thing, and so everybody was happy that night. The next day we had a, I guess I might as well say all, we had a great big steak dinner.

RG Do, please.

RW OK. Had a great big steak dinner and I... not dinner, lunch we were fed really good out there, one of the best places to eat. And it seemed like I always went out in the afternoon on a fire call when it's hot and it's windy, and, of course, here you jump at higher altit... elevation, so there was a fire call over on the Helena National Forest, not too far from the Mann Gulch Fire where a bunch of jumpers were burned in 1949. In a DC-3, which
at that time carried sixteen jumpers. OK, we had that party the	night before, a lot of people drinking and we had a steak
dinner... steak lunch and this was one or two hours later. So as
we were going over, three guys got sick... I know it was three
and threw up in the airplane, and here you're confined in there
and all that's going on, and there was... you always jumped,
usually, one older man with a new man, he was called... they
called the first year guy a new man. So there was probably eight
ew guys and eight older men. They were all sixteen jumped on
the fire, but... so... oh, got there... to the Helena National
Forest. We were using three man sticks, and I always try to get
in the front to see what was going on down there, what the
country looked like. It was myself and Joe Bernatz (?) and Dale
Swodane (?), he was the third guy out. And I don't know, we were
about the third or fourth stick, but one of my friends there was
still in the doorway and he was still sick, that's what I always
remember. [laugh]

RG  Oh, no. [laugh]

RW  So... and you had to kind of watch where you step. In a
three man stick, the first guy... that's why the first guy, he's
right in the door, all he's got to do is take one step and he's
out... out the plane. The next guy behind him has to take one or
two steps, and your... you gotta... a big personal bag here, a
reserve chute, a great big heavy chute here, you have a canvas...
er, this is nylon [inaudible] and a helmet, so it's awful hard to
move. And he has to take two steps and get out and try to keep a
certain form as he's going out. And the third guy has to take...
I don't remember, two, three, or four steps, so you have... your
footing's bad. [laugh] I mean, you had to watch what you're
stepping in. OK, we came down and I had twist my... one of my
risers was twisted most of the way down and Swodane came down,
and he... I think I was on the ground, I kind of remember, swung
in and his back hit a big rock. Joe hit a... landed in a small
spruce... harness of pine trees. And some other people ran over
to Dale that were already on the ground, and I went over to
Bernatz and he was coming out of a tree and his helmet... he'd
hit a limb somehow, a limb come through the earhole here and
turned his helmet around so he was looking out the earhole, and
he just had a slight cut there and he didn't hang up real good,
he had a hold on the the tree and then he came down. And so I
saw him and he had his helmet turned around and bloodied, and
Dale was down there and he was hurt bad. He had a broken back
and I just heard just the other day that he eventually died. I
think they gave him one to ten years at the time, they created
some sort of a fund for him... smokejumper fund for him. I think
it was high, he was from Georgia. But that was my first fire
jump, and I kind of wondered, you know, what... if they're all
going to be like that. [laugh]

RG  How did you feel after that first jump, ready to make
another one or were you...?

RW  Oh, yeah it was... I... like I say, usually the first one...
well, you have what... I guess you'd call it the macho thing or something like that, you can't hardly back out because you got all your friends there, so you'd do it. I don't have any problem like that because just gonna do it. I don't... you always kind of, after you got... it always seemed like you got in the airplane as it was taxiing out to take off, you always kind of wondered just what you were doing here, that type of a feeling. You had so many things going through your mind, you know, where you're going, and what you had to do. I always went over and over in my mind what procedure you had to do to get ready, make sure everything was ready and then... then go out the door. You're supposed to keep your feet together and stuff when you land you so they're not separate so, like if you come down too much... one... the leg spread, you take all the force on maybe one leg and that's what happens when you break them [inaudible] so just kept going through that all the time. I don't think I had too much problem with there with jumping. I think we only had one guy that refused to jump on a training jump, everybody else... went ahead. If you refused why I think they gave you another chance. If you didn't go then, well then you were out. [inaudible].

RG Did you ever make any rescue jumps as a smokejumper?

RW No.

RG What kind of parachutes did you use?

RW I think it was the FS 5-A, I think, I'm not sure. They were... started out with the twenty-eight foot chute. Oh, I weighed about 165 at the time, so they gradually... I think they were just getting the thirty-two foot chutes in. If you weighed around 200 pounds, then you used a thirty-two footer, but anything under 200 pounds, only use a twenty-eight foot main and reserve. So, I don't know what they do now.

RG Do you... can you explain to me how they operated?

RW You mean the chute?

RG Yeah.

RG Oh, let's see... of their round shaped and they had two slots in the back for the... you pulled on certain lines it would either close or open either one. If you pulled on both of them they would close, if you pulled one, that one would close and the air would... as you were going down... you were going down with the chute, the air would go through that one hole and turn you in that direction. So I guess... is that what you were...?

RG Right.

RW Yeah. Yeah, if you pulled down on the front risers it gave you more forward speed. I forget, they had three to six miles an hour forward speed, now they have, maybe, fifteen or twenty or
something like that. So that now... the ones they have now are more maneuverable. When I started, they didn't have what they call the deployment bag, D bags, on the chute. Just popped open, right open, so when you went out you got the full... the full shock. I think... I don't know, a few years later they put a... what they call a sleeve on it and it delayed the opening a little bit so you didn't get all that shock at one time, because you'd just... you'd go out and that chute... you'd almost come to a screeching halt all of a sudden from 100 mile an hour or whatever it was the plane was going and what your speed was dropping, so it'd really snap your head sometimes. You were supposed to tuck your head and that would really snap it a good headache once and a while.

RG Did you... were you ever injured when you were a smokejumper?

RW No. There were... I don't believe I ever had an injury jumping.

RG Did you ever have any malfunctions?

RW The only thing I had malfunction would be... it really wasn't a malfunction, it... I'd seem to have twists quite a bit where your risers are... and you're turning when you shouldn't be looking where you're going on the ground your twisting... trying... have to go the opposite way, kick the legs around and pull, so you'd lose time trying to get to the spot. And I always seemed to end up in trees a lot so that's probably part of it. [laugh] That... I was twisting too far down to the ground.

RG Did you think a lot about parachute malfunctions when you were a smokejumper?

RW No. They had... oh, the guys that rigged the chutes were all real good, they had quite a bit of training and they were... you just trusted them. They had their name on there so they weren't going to mess up. If something happened, why they would be talked to, dismissed or whatever. So I never... you always kind of joked about it when you saw somebody... see if they were jumping whether they were gonna jump his own chute or not. And so there were... oh, you might have thought about it, but you didn't... you trusted them. And we didn't have very many.

RG Did you ever... were you ever on a crew that someone had a parachute malfunction, or have you ever seen one?

RW Yeah, I can't remember too much. I know sometimes the reserved popped accidentally. I think that's what happened on one jump. And another one... they didn't talk... get around to talking too much in the reunion about getting up and telling stories, but there was one that might be interesting. Lynn Kraut (?) was the main supervisor... smokejumper supervisor at the time, when I was a new man, and Lowell Hanson was a squad leader. And we had a sixteen man jump over on the... I think it was the
Nez Perce where we had quite a few overhead. He didn't go out very often and the squad leaders didn't get out as much as like us. We rotate, they had to stay back for supervision, maintenance, and some chute packing sometimes. So this one had a lot of overhead on it and, of course, as they go out everybody... when usually you're watching to see how things go. And so they went out on a two man stick, just Kraut and Hanson and don't know for sure what it was... weight really doesn't make too much difference, but anyway, Kraut went out first, then Hanson went out and Hanson went right through the lines of Kraut and Kraut grabbed him, so they went down together more or less on two chutes. And so they... they were being tangled, they couldn't get away from each other, so they'd hold onto each other. I can't remember whether they were both the same elevation or not, but they were going down and, of course, it was timbered area. Going down, one chute would have air in it pretty soon it would slip off and the other would have air. As long as they both... one of them had air, it was OK. Both of them had air, but not completely full, so... if I can remember right. It might have been all one chute, but think they kind of rotate, because... just a little bit. And they went on down right through the trees so no one knew what happened, so then they hurried up and got two more guys down there. And I think Kraut had a sprained ankle is all, but us new guys was looking at that and said, "Wow! Two of the top guys in the group and that's what they tell us not to do." [laugh] But it was just... I don't know what caused it. You're supposed to go out as close as you can to each other and Lowell was small but heavy and Kraut was probably... he was taller, but probably about the same weight so there wouldn't have been any difference, I don't think, in the weight factor.

RG Can you describe for me the procedure that you would go through as you would jump out of the plane? What kinds of things would you try to do?

RW Oh, OK. I'm just... I'll go about this like you're the first man, let's say, in a DC-3 you're already in the doorway. You're looking... trying to see the spot you're gonna jump on, or looking at the fire, just trying to get an idea of the terrain features and how the fire was going if you could see it, if that where... if the plane was coming in that type of any angle. And you'd be ready to... the spotter... they had a spotter there that would tell you when to jump, and what he'd do is hit you on the leg or another type on airplane on your back. So... and like myself, I was always concentrating on looking out on the ground, seeing what was there. They want you to go as soon as they hit you so you're concentrating on that, you don't want them to say you hesitated too long, you missed the jump spot because you stayed in the doorway too long. I always had that feeling, I wanted to get out of there right away. And then thinking right about what... the next thing you were gonna do. You're gonna... you go out, tuck your head and put your arms together, put your feet together, and then start counting one... two... three... four, like, you know, the second... every second. And then you realize just as you count four you're suppose to reach up, pull
your risers apart and look up at your canopy make sure it was open. So I guess that's the major things at the time.

RG What kinds of planes do you remember jumping out of?

RW OK. I jumped out of the DC-2, DC-3, Travelaire out of Missoula... oh, and the Twin Beech. They still had the Ford Trimotor around, I never got to jump out of that one. I didn't jump out of the Travelaire, I don't think. And I always wanted to jump the Ford Trimotor that was still out there, but I never got a chance to. And then in Alaska, I jumped out of the Grumman Goose, and, I think, something called a B-18, and a DC-3... an old C-46, too. I think that was about it. Always wished they'd kept a Ford Trimotor and put it out there at the airport, but one went to the Smithsonian [Institution] and somebody bought the other one, I think. That would have been a nice plane to have out there either at the jump base or at the airport because it was unique for this country, used so much.

RG How many people usually went out on a fire?

RW It varied from... most of them were two man fires, which I didn't get too many of, because you get too many fire, you get the fire out in a hurry and your back in and you're ready to go jump. And I ended up on larger fires. After two, it was any multiple, you could have three, or four, or six, eight, sixteen was the most at that time out of the DC-3, and then they had to put in less men later because the aircraft was getting older, I guess. I think we had... I made the first fire jump, I think, out of the C-46 they had here and I think it was thirty two men on that fire. So that's about... I don't know what they have now.

RG You were telling me about sort of a smokejumpers dream story.

RW Oh, OK. I was gonna write that down.

RG And I wanted you to tell that.

RW OK, when we... the BLM jumpers, I think there was ten of us came down in 1970 for the fire bust they had down here in the Northwest. When we finally got to Missoula, they had a board there with a bunch of... I don't know if they were Polaroids or regular pictures at that time on the board there, and it was the whole talk of the base at the time. Two married guys had jumped up on... around Grey Wolf Lake area, up in the Mission Mountains, which is beautiful country and there was a lake there and there were four girls camped there. I think they were probably Missoula girls or all college... I don't know. So I guess the way it turned out, two of them left, two of the girls stayed there. And some of these pictures them with one of the girls coming up out... they got... one guy was helping her up out of the lake and all she had on was the smokejumper helmet with the wire mesh and just the shirt... what do you call it, the coat of the jumper thing. That's only one picture I remember, but there
were others like that. So... and they brought this back and that was... everybody going by there just looked at it and kind of shaking their heads. And, see, these were two married guys and I don't know, they stayed... probably stayed a couple days longer than they need to because a small fire they would have been in and out in a day or two. I don't know how long they were there, but quite a while. And the way I understand it, they didn't tell their wives right away, and they found out some other way, so [laugh] I guess they got in trouble that way. And I don't remember who they were, but that happened in about late July or August of 1970. I suppose somebody else knows something about it, but that would be a good one to bring out.

RG Right. Do you have any experience or jumps that were particularly beautiful or exciting that you remember?

RW Well, there was one, I think I saw... I think it was Bill Murphy the other day. He was the old man and I was the new man and we were... had been shipped over to Winthrop to help them out in 1961. And that was... we flew over Lake Chelan, which was really... a lot of steep cliffs and rocks and stuff, more so than here and these guys... there was usually a Winthrop jumper going with the Missoula jumper and they were jumping out on some of these cliff areas and being a new man, I didn't know that much, I would have gone, but Bill said later he wouldn't have jumped the area. We ended up with just the two of us in a DC-3 flying around and they had a fire north of there on the Pasaten River, I think it was. And flew up there and the spotter, which I found out later, was probably Kay Johnson after Alaska talking to him about this one jump. He told us that we'd be about a mile north of the border, we didn't have any maps of the area, but there's... all we had to do after the fire was go downhill to the creek and there'd be a trail there, and we'd hit the trail and walk on back into the States to an airstrip a few miles away. So we jumped on it and I came in and, like I say, somehow I ended up on the trees a lot, and this time I hit a snag, one of the dead trees there, and... which you're not supposed to hit because they fall over easy and things like that. And, I guess... the plane keeps circling until the jumpers are down on the ground and they're OK, so I was in a hurry to get down and you have the rope pocket here for your let down rope in your suit, and you take it through your D-rings and your suit here a couple times, it adds friction. And then you tie it into your risers, which is left on the tree and then you throw the rope down and you bring up the loose rope and you hold onto it and you just kind of... you get out of your harness and you just kind of roll right down the rope with that around the D-ring provides the friction, see. So I was in a hurry, did all... what I was supposed to do, dropped the rope down, and I was looking there and I could tell something was wrong. I tied it directly to the riser and hadn't tied it to my D-ring, so if I'd gotten out of my harness I would have just been... that was up about eighty feet, I'd just fallen down and probably I don't know what would... you know, broke my legs and what all happen. This one guy there and nobody around, no way to get in there. So kind of... I had to untie that with the plane
circling up there, bring it back down, and tie it the way I was suppose to and then tie it back in. And so we got down to the fire, it was an old fire, a lot of trees, and we had to do a lot of cutting with the old cross cut saw. So when we got that out, we had paper sleeping bags in the day, too... in that day to sleep in. They don't...

RG I didn't realize that paper sleeping bags were really made out of paper?

RW Yeah, they were a paper, a fiber type thing. They were real light and they were disposable. See, in that time, you could leave some stuff back in those days, or you could burn them. You usually what we did with those if we weren't going to use them, you just buried them, like on a pack out because it cut down a couple pounds of weight. And they were fairly warm especially in the Summer up here. Let's see... we left, we buried those, and left as much stuff as we could. See, when we had C-ration, at that time cans, so all those were buried at the time. Well, now they have freeze-dried food and they bring just about everything out. And I think there might have been another item or two left there, but I'm not gonna say, I don't remember. [laugh] But we had a lot of cutting to do on all that downfall, so we left and you have a lot of gear to pack out: cargo chutes, all you own chutes, your gear, your pulaskis, shovels, the cross cut saw. It's... they say up to 105 pounds, I don't think I ever packed that much out. But... so we went down... down hill to the creek, and there was no trail there. We had no map, so we knew we had to go up river to get into the United States. And, like I say, we'd been about a mile north. Well, we walked for, I think, seven hours. We had... I remember keeping track, we had to cross the creek about twelve times because you'd come to a cliff, you'd have to cross over and it was real thick spruce and... I forget, that took three and a half... four and a half hours. And the twelfth time we crossed the river there, it might have been waist deep, cold. We came to a sign that said U.S. BOUNDARY. And there was the trail— it started right there. [laugh] Instead of going up into Canada, it started right there, so we ended up hiking on down to a cabin that night and an airstrip the next day, but that was kind of, I suppose, one of my most unique jumps. We jumped in Canada and then I landed in a snag and... oh, when we cut my tree down, the parachutes up... I couldn't climb it, so we had to cut it down. If it was a live tree, normally you'd have tree climbing spurs and you climb up there and cut the top of the tree out and then you'd pulled it. The other guy's on the ground and he pull the chute out with your let down rope that you've left up there. I couldn't climb the spruce, so we just cut... climbed the snag so we cut it down and as it started to fall, the parachute blossomed out, it hit another snag right beside it, and just barely touched it, and that snag went over. So I just hit the right snag. If I hit the other one, it would... you know, I may have landed OK, but you can't tell. And then there was a great big boulder hidden by brush there. I remember coming in and I saw that thing and I kind of veered and that's why I hit the tree, I guess, I don't know. That's what interesting about
it.

RG  Exciting.

RW  Yeah.

RG  Do you remember seeing very much wildlife when you would be out in the wilderness?

RW  No. There's just not that much to see. I don't remember. It'd be according to how long you were out there and what area you were jumping on. Most of the fires would be in a timbered area so you don't have as much wildlife in a timbered areas as you would if the jumps were more out... if you were in the meadows, there'd be more chance, but being the jumps were during the day why, of course, everything is kind of laying down. And at night you're either working on the fire and there's nothing around, or else you're sleeping, one of the two. So I don't think... it's according to where you jumped, too. I never... I can't remember hardly seeing anything. But there probably was, I just don't remember. I was always thinking it would be kind of neat to be coming down and just to land on a bear and the parachute kind of come down around you. You know, I was wondering if that ever happened to anybody. [laugh]

RG  Were you ever involved in any project work out in the districts?

RW  Yeah, I... they had shipped us out, like, we had built some helispots out here on Rock Creek and come make... when we weren't on a fire and stuff... let's see, outside... one Summer of '62, there I was up at Whitefish most of the Summer working out in timber. And worked almost the whole summer up there. Went through refresher training, was up there most of the Summer. Timber crews are scaling timber and stuff like that. Being I was a forestry student, that kind of helped with my advancements in my career and stuff.

RG  Have you used very many of the skills you acquired becoming a smokejumper in your later career?

RW  Well, that helped get that job in Anchorage, as far as a loadmaster position. I suppose you can always use some of it, but I can't really be able to pin point it.

RG  Were the skills that you used reading maps helpful to you as...?

RW  Oh, yeah. Then again I was a... I was gonna say, I was in the forestry school anyway and so I used all that. The actual parachuting, I think you know what goes on, you got an idea, you know, something... a different phase of something that happened. I've been on fires before, so digging fire line and stuff was would have still been the same. I can't think of anything... I was in the service and I tried to go airborne, and I thought that
would help, but that didn't make any difference, I never did get it, so... [laugh] You have to... actually, I guess, there's two different things so you have to relearn from the way you learn to jump one way to the other way. So, it would have helped, though.

RG When you were smokejumping how many of the other smokejumpers were forestry students? Just a...

RW Probably... probably about 50%... I'd imagine... 25 to 50% for a range. Most of the ones out of Missoula were probably forestry students, but then they were scattered all over. I had roommates from Iowa... from Missoula, Iowa, and I think Mississippi was my first year out here. So it was a quite a mix that way.

RG Did you live out at the Aerial Fire Depot?

RW Yeah. Yeah, we had four of us in one room out there at the Depot.

RG Would you eat your meals there, too?

RW Yeah. We ate all meals there. In that day you ate all three meals there. And I'd say they had a real good lunch... er, a real good mess hall there. And I think the married guys probably ate lunch there, I'm not sure. According to what shift they had, too, I guess.

RG When you weren't out on project work and when you weren't jumping on fires, were you ever involved in any on base activity?

RW You mean during working hours?

RG Right.

RW Yeah. Yeah, they kept you busy. Oh, all the cargo chutes coming back in they had to be put in the tower and checked out for holes and marked if they had to be repaired. All this stuff coming back from fire had to be cleaned up and sorted out. Tools had to be resharpened. Some... they'd rotate you on various jobs. Sometimes you'd be working in the parachute tower checking chutes, you might be in there tearing down old packs that came back from a fire throwing away stuff you couldn't use and putting other stuff in certain bins that could be reused, or building new fire packs, jump packs like they have... fire packs is usually two people so you'd be putting... they'd have a list of so many cans of something, so many C-rations or dried food now, putting the pulaski in a certain way. Some of them now are used more or less as tour guides. I don't think we had the Visitor's Center then. I guess they did bring groups through, but they didn't have that Visitor's Center out there. Usually, I guess, the ones that are injured are the ones that kind of bring people through on the tour guide. And they had other groups out there on the fire retardant site to mix fire retardant for the retardant aircraft. Others would be working on the yard detail or... I see
they've landscaped it out there, the landscaping detail, they spend a lot of time on that. So you kind of rotated around on all those jobs, I can't remember, a day or two for each project, probably. So a lot of it was still kind of boring, but you were still getting paid and you were doing something, anyway. And then sometimes you'd go out on short projects away from... if you were... OK, it was according, probably, to where you were on the jump list, because you came back in from a fire, you went on the bottom of the jump list. Because they logged you in, they put your name... if there was fifty, you were number fifty one, and as the guys off the top went out on fires, you just moved up. So if you were on the bottom, you were more apt to be further away from the base, maybe, than some that might be out in the yard. If you were up in the top plane load, you'd probably be in there checking cargo chutes out. So they... if a fire call came, you were just out... you had your gear ready to go and you just get your gear and run out and either suit up or get in the airplane. So that's basically what the various things you would do.

RG Did you enjoy living out at the Fire Depot?

RW Oh, yeah. That was fun. Plus it was... I don't remember now what the... if we were charged for that or not. Probably were, but it was a very small rate compared to what it would have been, you know, having an apartment or something in town, although... of course you would have had more privacy in whatever you wanted to do in town, but right there you were at the base. Plus if your at the base... you know, the big advantage of living at the base, which didn't help me too much, was if you were low on the list, and they had a fire call and you had to gone in five or ten minutes, you were there. Most of the guys that lived off base were married guys and would have taken... if they could have gotten hold of them. I think you had to be on like a thirty minute call, you couldn't be gone more than thirty minutes from your house, but still you would have have... it might have been forty five minutes. So if they ever had a two man fire up in the Missions or something like that, if you were there, they'd go right down the list and who ever was there they'd take them. If the first six guys weren't there, say they were all married and lived in Missoula, or something, the seventh guy living right there... er, out there at the base could... that way, see, he'd get... he'd move up that much faster, he'd jump... he'd come back when those other guys were still here and he'd be working his way back up on the jump list. A lot of it was... some guys were going just for money, which means a lot of overtime on big fires, and others wanted to get the jumps. So the more often you go out, the quicker you'd come back in the more jumps you'd get.

RG Did you work a lot of overtime hours?

RW Oh, yeah, you'd put in... on the fires you'd put in a lot of time. I can't remember out there, now. They would keep you on... let's see now, I can't remember, now either. In stead of going to work at 8:00, you'd go to work at maybe 9:00 or 10:00 and then work until 7:00 or 8:00 because most of the fires start
more or less in the afternoon, in the heat of the day and the lightning storms in the afternoon, so they'd kind of keep them on later. Not so early in the morning, but later at night, because they're out, at that time anyway, found a lot of fires by patrol plane, why the patrol plane would go up early in the morning and maybe he'd be up for an hour and he'd spot a fire at 9:00. So it would have done any good to have somebody working in there from 7:00 'til 9:00, you know, that type of a thing. So that was a... I suppose the major thing, plus it's like when you live in a dorm, you have a bunch or friends out there. And you could go to town at night and have a party after, or whatever you wanted to do. Get back the next morning and be all ready to go. [laugh]

RG Did you have a lot of friends who were smokejumpers?

RW Yeah, quite a few. I don't know, probably not as close as some of my friends I had when I first came into the college here. You went through school with them and a lot of the jumpers you'd just see in the Summer. And once you left... like this reunion, you know, first time I've seen them in twenty years or fifteen years or so. So you had a close relationship, but I probably didn't get to know them as well as if you were living with somebody all year around like that for a couple years in college and stuff. Then the... I don't know, the variety of professionals is something out there. See, most of them at that time were young college students, you know, doctors, lawyers, medical students, every... veterinarians, everything you could think of. Well, I guess now they're a lot older. The turn over rate and most of... a lot of them are married and [inaudible] in towns that they jump out of. They've had a little problem like that, I guess, this year wanting to move them... those people out, but they're all married now in town. And instead of being a college student that could go out there and forget about it all summer, he's got a family in town to worry about.

RG Did you enjoy that aspect of the smokejumper program, in that there were a variety of people from a variety of places?

RW Yeah, that was interesting, yeah. It was just like college, too, there's a big mix here of various states. Yeah, it was interesting. You always have the inter-regional rivalries. The South and the North, and the West and the East type of stuff, too, so that helped. Guys from Texas or something like that. I remember when the Alaska crew came down, they had to come down and help out in '61. It was kind of unique to see these guys because they were all different, different type of clothing, and they had handle bar mustaches at that time, so they were... which I don't know if they allowed down here. There were different bases, different dress codes, and different, like, hair codes and stuff like that. At that time, of course, everything was pretty short, so... in the '60s.

[END OF SIDE A]

[BEGIN SIDE B]
RG This is side two of an interview with Rhett Wise on July 22nd, 1984. Rhett was just talking about...

[INTERRUPTION]

RG Rhett was just talking about the variety of people involved in the smokejumper organization and he mentioned the fact that there were some dress codes then. And I wanted to ask him, what kind of dress codes and, say, hair length standards there were?

RW OK. You know, at that time, of course, everybody had short hair, a lot probably crew cuts type of stuff. I don't think down here in Missoula, I don't know about the other bases down here, allowed any, like, facial hair, except they might have had short moustaches. And, of course, when the Alaska crew came down in '61, they had handlebar moustaches. They were just unique being it's kind of Alaska, hardly anybody'd been up there. It was not much more than then. I guess dress... there they used... maybe the same clothes, but different units had maybe different insignias they put on their shirt, or something like that. Region-1 had something, Region-2 had something else. There wasn't any long hair, there wasn't any beards, I don't think. I don't think they allowed any beards, at all, at that time. Which changed a lot when I came back... was in Fairbanks in '69.

RG Uh-huh. How was that?

RW Well by then the long hair had come in, various things happened, so... and I don't remember, I think you could have beards, too, it gradually changed, I think you can have beards but I've been out of it. I don't remember then if they had them or not. I don't think any in our outfit did, but they may have. But being jump crews were probably looked at more than just regular crew, they had to... they kind of tried to keep them a little bit different that way.

RG Have there been any changes in the smokejumper organization since you first became active with it that you would like to comment on, or that you noticed or become aware of?

RW [pause] None right off hand. I can't think of any different. Well, OK. [laugh] They have the women smokejumpers now. That's a big change with... a lot of mixed feelings on that. I think most guys, they... they figure if they can... if they can do the same work and everything, why there's no big problem. But I know at the reunion group here, I know a lot of things... and, well, "I wouldn't mind to go on a two person with her." You know, that's two people jump on a fire so, there's that aspect of it, the change now. I don't know if they changed any of the physical requirements or not. They have done it in the military. I don't know if the jumpers... you had to do so many chin-ups, so many push-ups, so many sit-ups, and run so far. And I don't know if the upper body strength is as great on a woman or not. I don't know how much difference it makes in fire
fighting. The only thing I ever think about is the pack out. I was in Vietnam and saw women over there carrying tons of stuff and some of the big guys... they have these, I don't know what they're called, two baskets and have them stick... carry them things and some of the big soldiers would pick those things up and about stagger and these women were eighty pounds, so.... [laugh] But I think probably the lightest guys were 125... 135 pounds and I don't know what the women are. Of course, there are some women that would have no problem packing than most men would. It's just... whoever they get would be the main thing. I think they got four here in Missoula now. The pack out would be the only thing I'd kind of wonder about. But it wouldn't make too much difference in the other way, I suppose.

RG Did your experiences as a smokejumper influence what you did in Vietnam, how you were able to handle certain experiences there?

RW Well, with the experience from being in the air, and you're relating things from the air... what you see in the air to the ground helped a lot. I was out in the field a lot, so as we were flying around in a helicopter, I could notice things on the ground that someone else that didn't have the experience, maybe, couldn't see. Things like that. And a lot more experience in map reading and terrain features, and things like that. Probably... let's see, I hadn't jumped for a couple years so I did have a... fairly good physical shape at that time compared to the bunch of high school kids who were going in at that time. That definitely was a big help. Anything to do with map reading or terrain and movement through the area, quite a bit. But also I would have... it would have been... I had some of the same advantages just being a forestry student and forestry [inaudible] and stuff like that. But anything you done outside helped.

RG Would you say that smokejumping had a big impact on your life?

RW Oh, yeah.

RG In what ways?

RW Maybe if I hadn't done that, I'd been more studious or something like that, you know and done better in school, I don't know. I spent all that time outdoors and... OK, if I'd not been jumping, see, I would have probably taken one or two years. If I were to... and from there I went onto another type of fire thing with the Service. If I would have split off after a year or two right into more timber management and recreation, or something like that, actual, how do I say, professional work, why maybe I would have gotten on track and gone on that. But I was seasonal, 'til I was thirty-four... seasonal work, which, you know, by thirty-four a lot of guys in forestry outfits are District Rangers or something like that. So if a guy was wanting to go up in a... if that's... not too good that way. If you want to go up in the smokejumper outfit or fire control, why the more
experience would help, but I didn't have any big desire for it, I guess. I like [inaudible].

RG Why did you decide to stop smokejumping?

RW I always thought about going back it might be discriminating against me but I had... I always had a little back problem. I'd been... let's see, the first two years... more or less quit on account of that. Came back from the service... jumping... the same... let's see, the air cargo and the reason I got out of the jumping and getting in was back problem. Nothing major, I don't think, but's just enough to bother me. The same with the air cargo, I had to quit lifting so much stuff on account of my back, so if I had a good back all the way through I probably would have stayed in forever. That's... it was fun. Although the longer you stay with it, the more or less higher you go in the organization, the less you get out, the more paper work you have than anything, so that might have been a drawback, too. [laugh]

RG Were you ever injured when you were a smokejumper?

RW No. That was kind of funny. I had a bad back, I had... I was always careful about that, and that's one reason, maybe, I spent more time drawing on... lawing (?) on the exit, going out and having... trying to have a good position and really trying to land right that I maybe didn't hurt a leg or something like that. A lot of people had sprained ankles or knees or something. I never had anything at all I could think of. I never missed a day as far as injury, which is one of the grating things for some guys... a friend of mine who's here now was out about thirty days with a sprained ankle that first year, and he ended up with the same number of fire jumps as I did. And I was out... wasn't out one single day. It's just that same factor. He got on the smaller fires and got back in faster, while I went out, I was on the bigger fires. Maybe I was out five days, he was on the fire for two days, when he came back in he was higher up on the list by the time I came back in. And it was... kind of worked that way. That's where I was always kind of halfways irritated both here and Alaska that I stayed around, ready to go and it just didn't work out right. [laugh]

RG If... so, if you had your choice, would you rather go out on a small fire... small short fire or a long...?

RW Yeah, I would rather have the smaller fire?

RG Do you think most people prefer that?

RW I think, and again, it... the smaller fire, normally your back in fast and you're gonna get more jumps. And the larger fire, your not gonna get as many jumps, but your gonna... chances are you're gonna have more overtime. Not necessarily, but probably, because if your on a fire too long... when you first go out on a fire and you're working, at that time, I think you could put in twenty four hours... the first day twenty four hours, and
then it went down to twenty hours and then eighteen. Now it maybe something different, maybe they only pay you eighteen hours for the first day, cut it down. So that would make a big difference, is how many hours you can get in on a fire. You could get quite a few hours on a two man fire, because you'd be going out one day, you could log maybe twenty... twenty four hours on that fire, get back in and go right out on another one where you wouldn't be cut down to so many hours a day, because it was a new fire. So... but I think, basically, if you're on a bigger fire, you get more hours, basically.

RG  What was the biggest fire that you remember fighting?

RW  Just a few thousand acres of actual fire, but up in Alaska they'd jump you on parts of a big fire. So... and you would just for an hour or so on it, about a 300,000... 400,000 acre fire in Alaska. But we were [inaudible] on it. We had jumped on a couple hundred thousand acre fires, but they just jumped you on part of it, maybe cut down the fire on this side while the rest... well, it would be like when you see... you might have jumped on that side of the fire yesterday to kind of head that off, and it wouldn't go any further, you just cut off part of it. Because maybe this other one had burned into a river, you know, that type of thing. I was different.

RG  Are the fire management policies significantly different in Alaska than they are in the lower 48.

RW  Oh, yeah. It's entirely... there again, I haven't been into it for several years. It is so large up there and the land pattern has changed so much in the last ten years, that it's still, it's like everything else up there, it's just... things are just forming. Kind of hard to explain because there's new Park boundaries, I mean millions of acres of Parks that... they would fight if they could before, and now it's kind of a let burn policy.

RG  Why is it a let burn policy?

RW  Well, Park Service is supposed to be natural, the same like the wilderness. If a fire starts... I think if it's a lightning fire it's supposed to let burn naturally, because that's the way it's been for centuries. But now if it's a man-made fire, see that... if it's a man made fire usually starts lower, a lot like here on this hillside. Lightning fire wouldn't have started there. It would have started it on top and wouldn't burn as much. But the man caused fire burns... it starts at the bottom and it burning up, it just takes up so much more area. So... and a man caused fire is more unnatural, it would take you 10,000 years to build up that, I guess. [laugh] But it's... I don't know, it's growing pains up there. They're... they keep jockeying around to find out what's going to be the best thing to do in Alaska. The state of Alaska has taken over a lot more of the fire. But it used to be all BLM. Now it's sort of BLM and state. So it's... it's kind of confusing. [laughs]
RG Being a....

RW But here you have communities who have been here for hundreds of years and... boundaries pretty much separate where cities are and where certain areas are. Up there it's just one. So, they've got policies that let burn almost any condition, take limited action. It's crummy. Native villages, where before they may not have worried if it burned over a certain area, now that land belongs to them. It didn't used to before, now it belongs to them and they got thinking about protecting it. So they made... instead of ten years ago they may not worried if it'd burned out, but now, if it's burning in a certain area they may want the state or BLM to go out there and put the fire out. That causes a lot of problems. Especially if it's burning in federal land here and it's burning towards native, when do you take action? If you let it burn too long, and it gets on native land or somebody else's land, they're going to be upset about it. That they should have done something earlier. So it's....

RG Are there some beneficial aspects to the... to fires and to the let burn policy?

RW Oh, yeah. I think so. Like... well, on this hillside here, for example. That burned a lot of old dead grass, I mean the last...

RG I just want to say that the hillside that Rhett Wise is talking about on the tape was one that just burned in Missoula yesterday. And... started in the afternoon and burned... would you say about half of the...?

RW Pretty close to half of it. Yeah, the west side.

RG Of Mount Sentinel. So we're talking about a recent burn in Missoula. Please go ahead. Excuse my interruption.

RW But that burned a lot of the old dead material up there. That's not going to... see, that won't burn again. Until next year there. But normally you have to accumulate some more dead grass, and stuff like that. So... and this was kind of a... it was still kind of green up there, so a lot of material probably didn't burn bad. If it had been all dead... say a month later. There was more dead material there... dried material, it would have burned hotter. It may have burned more of the soil material. So this, you can't tell, but it might have just burned the grass and the soil might be OK. It's kind of a cleansing action in certain type of vegetation. OK, that burned up to the... see, those Ponderosa Pine trees up there. But it didn't burn those... hurt them at all, the bigger ones. You know, it burned the brush underneath it. But that brush, eventually, would have grown... maybe even the Ponderosa Pine tree, high enough at times, or enough dead material on the ground, see, it could have jumped to the crowds. Then you'd have had a crown fire and it would have killed maybe all those big pine trees up
there. For now, they had that thick bark. Probably didn't bother it... bother it mostly. You can't help something small... critters. It is a cleansing action. And in Alaska you can see... you'd fly over that country... oh, and it looks, a lot of it's... say, tundra area, but you come up to every... and the little streams are maybe... 80, 90 foot spruce trees there. Right along the creek bottom. And they've been there for maybe 200 years. And the reason they haven't burned it... just, it's wet there. But that other area burned... probably every 10, 20 years up there. That's why some of it stays, kind of, tundra there. Open area. That they've had these lightning fires for centuries that burns those area, burns up to the drainages and it quits. But the trees, and various things, right along the creeks, lakes, continue to grow. But now if they... this is what I think has happened up there in places. Since they started fighting fire, they've gone in there, put some of these fires out when they were small, burning these areas. So, 20 years later you've got, instead of an inch or two of debris, you've got maybe that much. A big fire gets a head start and they can't put it out, and it burns right over the drainage and takes the trees with them, that have been there for centuries. Or, say, a century or two. So you've lost those. And that's on account of, probably, man fighting those other fires. So he's in there messing around where he doesn't really know. They don't know anything. They haven't been fighting fire up there really... '59, '57 so... Where down here they have a little more history of fire fighting. They know a Ponderosa Pine tree, that you get a fire going through there every so often, it cleans outs the material. I guess that's basically what....

RG Are there any other great stories, or thoughts and experiences that you would like to talk about today?

RW Oh... I don't think too much about it anymore. I don't... not too many. I don't have as many stories as most guys. [laughs]

RG Any parting words about having been a smokejumper?

RW On the questionnaire they'd said something about, now air cargo in Alaska. I don't know if you were going to get into that, or...?

RG Sure. It would be... I'd love to.

[INTERUPTION]

RG Rhett's going to talk about some of his experiences that he had working as a cargo...

RW Yeah, smokejumper. Yeah.

RG Smokejumper in Alaska.

RW Yeah. And then '70, I was saying, Bill Boles and I were in
Alaska as co-foremen of the Anchorage District Air Cargo Program. And we were using DC-3's, C-46's, and Grumman Goose aircraft, basically for cargo dropping and point to point cargo hauling in Alaska. Anchorage District, mainly out in Aniak to McGrath and Unlakleet. And... see, we kept barrel fuel caches out at small airstrips, anywhere from 6 to 12 barrels of aviation... let's see, aviation gas or... jet fuel for helicopters and turbine engine aircraft. Let's see... on the cargo dropping we had... I think Bill was real good at going out and scavangering equipment out at Ft. Wainright, the excess area out there. So we made roller tracks, so we could put them in the aircraft, and tie it down. That way could... like in a DC-3, instead of having just, rolling one barrel to the door, having parachutes on it and... in dropping it, why, this way you could have... I don't know, I think we had, maybe, 3 barrels at a time on the roller track. And then when the pilot gave the signal, you could push all three barrels out at one time, so you were getting three times as much cargo out there. Same way with... when you put various types of fire fighting equipment in boxes, why, the roller track helped a lot. I don't think they had any there when we got there. Also, OK, we used a C-119 that year. Had two sets of roller track in that. And on practice drops, out at the Anchorage District Office, at Campbell airfield, when we could... we dropped 15 barrels of fuel at one time. On roller tracks... two sets of roller tracks. And the Grumman Goose was used quite a bit because it could also... we could go out and drop cargo, and pick up people in lakes. Because it was a water aircraft, could land on lakes and streams.

RG Were those rescue...?

RW No, no. These were just dropping...

RG Those were just...

RW OK, what you have up there...

RG Pick up smokejumpers, huh?

RW Yeah! Picking up fire fighters, smokejumpers, or various things like that, yeah.

RG Did very many smokejumpers have to pack equipment, or themselves out to trails in Alaska, or were they most often picked up by planes or helicopters?

RW I think most of it up there has been by... a lot of it by helicopter probably more than anything else. Being as there are a lot of lakes in certain parts of Alaska, a lot of them get picked up by Grumman Goose or some other type of amphibious aircraft.

RG Are there very many water jumps that are made in Alaska?

RW I don't know. I... they don't, I don't think they jump
specifically to hit the water, no. Some may miss their spot and hit the water, and I think all the gear they have now floats better than... the old type gear didn't float, I don't believe. Well, they do have all this padding in there, too. Which would be... I don't know what it is now, but it would... it would tend to be... have floatation to it. But they would... gee, you have trouble with the parachute, all the line getting tangled on those would be... especially in a moving body of water. A lake may not be too bad but you can get tangled up in the river pretty easy.

RG Were you ever trained to make water jumps?

RW Oh, let's see. They gave us some sort of instructions what to do, and I can't remember what it was anyway. Be ready to get out of your gear and... I forget what it would have been, now. You wanted to get out of your... get the weight off as much as you could and try not to get tangled up in your... all those shroud lines you have there in the canopy itself. Because you could get really tangled up in that stuff.

RG Did you ever make any water jumps?

RW No. I never... never came close. That doesn't, I don't think, really happen much at all. Where most of the fires are, they're usually away from... that's the trouble. They're away from water too far. [laughs] See, on that cargo thing... in 1971 in... we started getting a British aircraft with a... called the Argosy. And it was a... it's a 4 engine turbo aircraft with... on the ground you could open it up both front and rear. To load cargo front and rear, or unload cargo that way. And there for a couple of years, one they had the type where you couldn't drop out of it except for a side door. But it was real good, it was fast for point to point cargo, so we hauled a lot of... and in Alaska it's mostly air cargo stuff. So we'd haul... I don't know, I think it's 2,000,000 pounds a year, just to... in that area. We'd use roller track on that too, also the forklift. You'd... you could bring a pouch of stuff in with cargo and drop them on that roller track, and then roll them. One person could roll the thing up into the aircraft, where if you'd had to do it by hand it would have taken several guys quite a while to carry the stuff back and forth. So that... that helped. We could get... I think it carried 25,000 lbs. of gear.

RG Was that a significant difference from the way that cargo was loaded in the lower 48?

RW [inaudible] No. They do pretty much the same thing here they just haven't got into it there. But, like, this aircraft, this Argosy hauled 25,000 lbs. where the DC-3, we... maybe 5,000 lbs. at a time. And this was in flat, where the DC-3 you had... it was an angle, so you had to have it pushed up off... and this was a... this one you could load, I forget... you could, supposedly, you could land and... that plane and load it and... unload it and load it in 5 or 10 minutes, if you had the right equipment. 25,000 lbs. So that would have been fast but that
was under ideal conditions and didn't usually have that. They still use the Argosy up there, it's more or less... that was, more or less, used out of Anchorage at the time. Fairbanks has... been the main fire area up there. Anchorage is sort of a sub-base, starting in the late '60's on account of some fires that they had down at Kenai Peninsula. I think that's what it was. But the change in fire priorities in Alaska why, Fairbanks is still the, again, the main fire base, and so I think they keep one Argosy based up there, and then one at Anchorage, but the other... the Anchorage Argosy works a lot... quite a bit out of Fairbanks, too. And they now have one Argosy that has a clam shell in the back so they can open it up in flight and then drop cargo out of it. There in the '70's was... DC-3, and C-46, and 119, and then the Argosy was used pretty heavy up there for air cargo. And... let's see... Fairbanks started experimenting with... I think Bill Boles, more or less, he's my... one of my best friends, he got a lot of military excess stuff. 500 gallon Army rollagons that would hold 500 gallons of various types of fuel. Which they need... beings there's so much helicopter work on those remote fires, they started experimenting. I think Fairbanks got into it more than what we did. They were dropping those out of the 119, aircraft like that. And they had a few mishaps at first, but, you know, 500 gallons of fuel come... that's about 3000 gallons, if the chute didn't open right, when it hit, it made a pretty big splash. But they do a lot of heavy dropping with that stuff, up there. And Fairbanks, I think, did most of that. And did most of the experimenting. Bill got a lot of... he started, more or less, getting a lot of those rollagons and then... not so much air cargo, but it'd have to be hauled back and forth, it's big rubber bladders for fuel. 3000 to 50,000 gallon bladders. But those were hauled out, put up, out in some remote airstrip, and then the fuel was hauled in by cargo aircraft and they'd pump it... you know, pump it into... tanks in the aircraft and then take... pump it out into the bladders, or rollagons, out in the remote areas. And the helicopters go in and use that and at the end of the year that has to be brought back in. So, that's all part of the air cargo work up there. So a lot of them... lot of it was... every year you had a bunch of point to point cargo to move and if you had a lot of fires, then you had a lot of air cargo. First year I think we made 2 air drops out of the Goose in Anchorage. The next year we had, maybe a hundred air drops, so it varies. Goes in cycles. How many fires you have and how much work and how much overtime and how much money you make. [Laughs]

RG  OK. I'd like to thank Rhett for sharing his experiences as a smokejumper with me today and this is the end of this tape.

[END OF INTERVIEW]