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Interviewee: Ed Nafzinger

Interviewer: Kim Taylor

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Project: Civilian Public Service Smokejumpers Oral History Project

Kim Taylor: This is Kim Taylor with the Smokejumper Oral History Project. Today, I'm interviewing Ed Nafzinger at Camp Paxson at Seeley Lake, August 11, 1986. To start off with, Ed, I'd like you to give us a brief biographical sketch—where you were born and where you went to school.

Ed Nafzinger: All right. I began life in Missouri. [laughs] I was born in Missouri, and my parents moved to Oregon when I was just a baby—six months old, I believe. I grew up in Oregon from there on. Attended schools in Salem. We moved to a farm, so my background is really farm experience, and attended schools in Salem, Oregon. Attended an elementary school—a rural school, country school—and then went to high-school in Salem, and worked on the farm with my father. Then World War Two broke out in 1941, of course, and in the spring of 1942 I was inducted into Civilian Public Service [CPS] camp in Cascades [Locks], Oregon, along the Columbia River. Then, a year later, in 1943, the information about this project was distributed to our camps, and I and a couple friends immediately volunteered, which resulted in my being the very first group that came here. Earl Cooley met us in Missoula, Montana, with the Forest Service truck and brought us out to Seeley Lake here, and that was the beginning of this career here for three fire seasons.

After that, I was discharged in 1946 and went home back to Oregon, and got married and lived in the farm for a few years. Then started a college career. Already had three children, so I went to college and went right on through and got my master's degree and started teaching school. Taught school for 17 years. Then I resigned in 1979, and am presently working with my brother in our own company, servicing microscopes and selling microscopes. So that's sort of a brief sketch up to the present.

KT: Can you give us a little more information with your process of getting your 4-E classification for the CPS?

EN: All right. I grew up in a Christian home—a Mennonite home—and attended a Mennonite church from the very beginning—all my life really—from baby on, and grew up in that sort of an environment, atmosphere. Consequently, from that background, was inclined to resist the war. So I was inducted into Civilian Public Service. That was a choice I made at that time rather than go into the army or some other branch of service, and I had no problems in receiving the classification: 4-E. That came about in the normal channels of operation. So this was my [unintelligible]. Then, as I approached the choice of going into smokejumping, my thinking was that I knew friends and a lot of young men were going into the army. Some of them were going to encounter some real hardships and some real struggle and turmoil, and I wasn't totally

satisfied to stay where I was. I didn't feel like the assignments we were given were necessarily significant in a comparable manner. So this seemed to be something that I felt I could do and make a worthwhile contribution to mankind, as well as save our resources. It was something that I felt that needed to be done. Manpower was scarce at that time for this sort of thing, so I was eager and ready to volunteer for this, and anxious. So I didn't hesitate at all, as I recall, to offer my services in this capacity. We were selected. It just seemed like it all proceeded in an orderly manner, and we found ourselves up here, then, in rather short order, actually.

KT: How did you hear about the smokejumper jobs?

EN: As I recall; through information that was sent to our camp—to the camp directors of our camp. I believe this information went out to all of the camps—I think that was the case—and men in camp were able to make this choice if they wanted to. Many other fellows went to the other branches—as you probably know—and other services and hospitals and some large projects of other kinds, but this was my choice to this branch and to make my contribution here.

KT: What kind of project-work were you doing before you actually started training as a smokejumper?

EN: Well, part of the time...I was inducted into the camp at Cascade Locks. There we were assigned trail maintenance and work of that kind, mainly. Trails that were important to get into the backcountry for fire protection and so forth. Most of my time there was spent in that kind of work, but I was only there seven months and then was transferred to California. There, I was assigned to work in the Institute of Forest Genetics, which was a U.S. Department of Agriculture experiment station just a few miles from the camp where I was at. It was an interesting place. They had quite a large plantation of various forest trees, and they were experimenting, doing research, and working in hope of stimulating growth and the quality of trees for lumber use. So I was working there up to the time that I volunteered for coming here. There was several of us working there, and we were compiling records and working in various aspects of the work that was going on there, mainly inside the building. We didn't do much out on the plantation. We'd do some work out there, but it was...My particular assignment, at least, was primarily inside the Institute there, working with records, and seemed like we designed some plans. Some of this is a little vague now [laughs] after all these years but I enjoyed that work, and it was, I felt, worthwhile and significant. But I felt this [smokejumping] was far more significant under those particular circumstances and emergency that we were in. as far as our country was concerned. So, I was anxious to get into this work, and I'm glad I did. It was a worthwhile adventure. We were really—I believe—we were a unique class of fellows that got together here. I think that kind of shows up in our unit here as we have our reunion here. So I've treasured these years.

KT: What were some of your first impressions when you got here and started training?

EN: We were the first fellows. It was fortunate in a personal way, because I was selected for some specific assignments which I really enjoyed. I remember Earl Cooley bringing us up, and of course, the area's beautiful. It's different than other areas I've been in. The huge tamaracks, the lake, and the environment is different than what I'd experienced, and it's pretty. I like it. They brought us in here, and there was mixed feelings. We represented, to them, possible problems. I think they looked upon us in that way, by some fellows. Earl Cooley stood out in my mind as kind of a special fellow. He didn't show this much. They treated us real well right at the start, even though they didn't know us, really. I remember that first meal—that first dinner that night—was something we hadn't been used to, and those sort of things kind of impressed me. Then, above that all, was the adventure that we were anticipating—the experience of something that was so different than any of us had known. Questions in our mind—what was this going to be like. Of course, we got into training right soon, and we began to learn what was going to be involved. So that probably covers pretty much the first main impressions that come to mind.

KT: Can you tell us a little bit about your training-period?

EN: The training was good. We saw value in it the further we went along, of course. It was rugged, it was strenuous, and it developed bodies that I didn't have before. Climbing the rope hand-over-hand without the use of our legs, and learning to roll and tumble and take the bumps, and all of this. As time went on, we realized that this was important. I didn't have any negative feelings about it. I had volunteered to come here and to do what I could do, and I didn't have any reservations about participation, or hesitancy, to go ahead and jump off of the tower or make my first parachute jump or any of this. I just knew I was here to do it, and I was going to do it. So that was that was my attitude that dominated my thinking, pretty much, through this experience.

KT: Where did all your training take place?

EN: We began our training right here. We had an obstacle course across the lake. A friend of mine and I was chosen to pilot the boat across the lake. We crossed the lake each day—each morning and each evening. It was an old lifeboat—great big thing—and had an inboard motor in it. Louis Gooseman (?) and I. I don't know what our title was [laughs], but we maneuvered that thing across the lake each day. Then we trained on the obstacle course over there, and then our landing strip...I can't recall just exactly where that was, but it was somewhere over in that area where we started to make our first parachute jumps. Of course, we had fire training. We were trained in the use of the fire tools we were going to be using, and the methods used in the forest, and use of a marine pump, if it was a fire where this could be used. Use of water, use of radio, and all of this. How to retrieve our parachute, and the normal procedure that we'd go through soon as we hit the ground. We covered all of these things. It was it was quite an extensive training program that we went through, but it was good. I enjoyed it all, as I recall going back. It was a healthy experience.

KT: Do you feel like the training sufficiently prepared you for the actual fighting of fires?

EN: I think it did. I wouldn't know what I would add to it, really. I think [unintelligible] we were prepared. Did you see the National Geographic film? Methods have changed, and they've intensified some of this. I'm sure there's a purpose in it. They probably have reduced some injuries and so forth. But way back in those days, I think we did pretty well, really, being...Think back 40 years, I think we had adequate training on the basis of the stage of development that the project had reached at that point. I think the Forest Service and the men that we worked with directly did a good job.

KT: How long was your training period before you actually went out on a fire?

EN: Oh dear, [pauses] I don't know how many weeks it was anymore. It seems like it might have been something like six weeks that we were training, and we were required to make seven parachute jumps before we were qualified to jump on a fire. I think all of us—the first fires didn't arrive right away—so I think most all of us made an eighth jump before we actually got on our fire, in the interval in between we made another jump. We finished our training, and then we were sent out to the various base camps where we served for the summer. I was with a group of other men—I'm not sure how many anymore—were sent out to Moose Creek—the heart of the Bitterroot primitive area—for the summer fire patrol.

It turned out that I had a real hard landing on my fourth jump. I hit a fast movement of air just a couple hundred feet above the ground which started me in severe oscillation, and same rate my rate of descent accelerated and I hit the ground on a real severe backwards swing as I came down. It just slapped me down on the ground. I was stunned. I wasn't unconscious as I recall, but I was stunned. Of course, being a training jump, there were observers right there, and they saw this. They didn't expect me to move. By the time I did start to move, they had already driven up with a pickup there expecting to pick me, but by that point I had begun to wonder, I wonder if I can move a leg. [laughs] I found I could, and I got up. I made a jump the next day, but I should not have done it, if I'd known, because I had received a brain concussion and didn't realize it. My back was pretty sore, but I was determined to finish my training. I was not going to give up. So I went right on and finished my training and went on out to Moose Creek for summer assignment, but this problem began to become more irritated, and pressure began to build up. My eyes got blurry. I couldn't see, and I got sick to my stomach. I just couldn't go on. So they flew me out to the hospital from Moose Creek, and the doctor diagnosed a brain concussion. He prescribed six weeks in bed without bathroom privileges. I was to be fast in bed.

We'd gone from here to Moose Creek, and by that time we'd spread out and a group had been sent to Ninemile. That's where they flew me from the hospital. I was in the hospital four or five days, I believe, and they gave me a room there. I can't believe all of this now [laughs], but our camp nurse waited on me for six weeks and they made me stay in bed. Of course, I progressed, and got well, and mean as ever, I guess. Then I started to do light jobs. I missed that whole first fire season. I didn't get a single fire jump. In fact, I didn't jump then until the next spring. That

was hard to take, but I began to do some jobs around. I got a picture myself doing some ironing—ironing shirts for the fellows—and doing things of that kind and then gradually did more and more. After all, six weeks in bed kind of incapacitates you. They wouldn't do that nowadays, I don't think, but that's what they did then.

Then I was chosen for parachute rigging. I was one of the fellows chosen for that. That winter, I believe it was, we went into Missoula, and we were we were staying in the Priess Motel, the old Priess Motel. The Forest Service covered all of this, of course, and we ate there and we worked in the parachute loft every day. We made some of our own harnesses, we repaired parachutes. The Irvin parachutes that we used had the big slots in the back. They didn't come that way from the factory. We put those in them. We'd lay them out on our tables and cut those slots, and then sew reinforcing tape around that slot and rip wouldn't continue. We repaired parachutes. We did all kinds of work like that. I'd run sewing machines for hours, and of course, that was enjoyable.

Then I was trained for packing, and I packed...I don't know—I could check back in my records—but several hundreds of parachutes. We'd bring them in and inspect them and then repack them for jumping again. So I consider myself to have been kind of privileged to have some of these special activities. I made, I guess it was, three exhibition jumps for the Forest Service that others didn't get to make, which I considered a special privilege. I did photography. I did quite a lot of photography for the Forest Service, and then it was a hobby of my own. I made a 16-mm training film for them. They give us the privilege of using a photo lab of Mr. Swan [K. D. Swan] who was the official photographer for park...for the national forest—Lolo Forest—and we used his lab there in the Federal Building in Missoula for developing, printing, enlarging, and so forth. These are all treasured experience.

I don't know if you've looked at my private collection of photos in there—

KT: Yes, I did.

EN: You did look at those?

KT: They're beautiful photos.

EN: I didn't have my name there, but that's mine and all my own work. So those are kind of extra special, as I recall, of course.

KT: Did you do some project work through the winter?

EN: Yes, well, mainly loft work, see. Those days, the army got a lot of most of the parachute equipment, and so we made quite a few of our harnesses and doing some of the canopy work I mentioned. So we were pretty well occupied through the winter. There was about four of us, I think, that worked in the parachute loft. Maybe five...something like that. That was mainly what

I did. Some photography work, while some of the other men did other assignments. They made hay in the summer between fires, and some of them went on outside work in the winter, cutting wood. I'm not sure what all they did do, but they had other assignments of this kind through the winter. So we were all pretty well occupied with something going on in between fires and in the winter.

KT: Did you notice any big differences in the crews the second year?

EN: You mean in quality or characteristics of the fellows?

KT: The characteristics of the crew.

EN: I don't think I could say that I did. I think they were...Of course, by the second year, word had gotten back to them of what our experiences were, and so they could approach it with a little different mental attitude. I think as we met these men and associated with them, I think they probably had attitudes very much like ours. As I mentioned, wanting to make a worthwhile contribution and determination. We were talking at the table after viewing this film this morning about any evidence of hesitancy the men were just dismissed right away. We couldn't recall that there was attitudes of that kind in our group. If they were, they were concealed. We didn't see it. But everybody went up, and we never pushed anybody out of a plane. The jump tower was probably, almost, as rough and scary as going out of an airplane for some of the men. That's kind of crazy to get up there and just drop off into space, whether you're 50 feet up or whether you're 1,000 feet up. So, for some of the men, that was a little hard.

It's an interesting experience to go through. We've done a lot of talking here with each other and reviewing, but I've always considered my fourth parachute jump the hardest one. We came here with real anxiety and determination to get into the work here, and we made our jumps—that first jump or second jump—well, we were kind of ignorant. We just had this strong motivation, so we just got up and went out. By the fourth jump, you begin ask yourself some questions. What am I doing here? Your thinking had changed some, and it resulted in a little harder to go through that airplane door and drop out. Then after that, then you begin to accept it. I don't think I would say, ever, that it was easy. Some fellows say that it was easy. It didn't bother them, but I don't believe them. [laughs] I think it's too unnatural to do something like that, but it was enjoyable once you were out to float through the air and try to use your skills and maneuver your parachute and aim for the spot which was usually very important, of course. Combat the air movements and all of this. We developed skill that we had to employ there, so your mind was busy on this and the descent was usually kind of enjoyable, really.

KT: Can you tell us a little bit about your first fire experience?

EN: The first fire. I don't know if I can specifically...I kept a log, I should have reviewed that, if I'd have known this was coming up. I don't know that I can specifically remember that first one. I don't think it stood out as anything particularly outstanding. There were some fires that I

jumped on that come to my mind before the first one. If I'd look back in my log, I'd probably find that the first one was just an average small fire, like the average fire we would get on. We'd get there early enough so that it wouldn't have gone very far.

I was on one big fire where they took two Tri-Motor loads out of eight men each, and I tell you, we really worked. It was a hot fire. Like the pictures they showed this morning. Of course, when they show pictures of a forest fire, they're going to show a pretty hot one when most of them weren't that hot. But we were on one that was like that. The weather was hot, of course. That's when the fire would be hot. When it's hot, and dry and there's a breeze blowing, that's when the fire's going to burn fast, and that's when it did. It would burn and blow, and we'd work—try to build our fire line. Being in the smoke, you'd cough and choke and sweat. We'd watch it, and a spark would fly over and we'd stomp on that. I was in spots where I saw a spark fly and I see little spit of smoke, and I wasn't able to put that out. The conditions were so severe. I was right there, and it would spread out. You couldn't even put it out. Sometimes it would be that severe. So we'd start another trail and then it would blow over that, and we'd start another trail. Finally you'd just almost die, [laughs] you'd be so exhausted. Sometimes you would just give up, and you figure, really, we can't do anything. You wait and hope that evening, the humidity would rise and the breeze would drop down, and then you could take advantage of that in those conditions and gain on it then. That, obviously, stands out in my mind—that fire.

Then, I was on one man-caused fire that seems to stick in my mind up in the Seven Devils [Mountains] country along on the Snake River across in Idaho. It's high, rugged country. This was a government man—I don't remember what he was doing out there—but he had chosen a spot to camp alongside a nice little creek there. He'd had a campfire, and apparently, he'd walked away for some reason and it started to spread. We don't know what happened because he wasn't around. Anyway, when we got there, why, his camp tools were there. We could see where he'd camped. In this case, they threw a marine pump out for us by parachute. Little gas-powered marine pump and a can of gas and fire hose. We made a little dam in this creek and used water to fight this fire. It hadn't got very big. We were there early enough to have got it under control, and it probably hadn't spread more than maybe a half acre or something like that.

That's just a little sample of some of the fires, but normally, lightning would strike and the fire would burn under the tree and sometimes maybe not be much bigger than this area right here. Other times maybe several times as big, of course, but the conditions wouldn't be so bad that we could soon get it under control. I don't know if we should get into all of those kinds of details or not.

KT: Were you ever involved in any rescue jumps?

EN: No, I didn't get any rescue jumps, not myself. These exhibition jumps were the only thing that wasn't the normal smokejumping or training jump that I participated in. One of these exhibition jumps, a planeload of—I think they were from Akron, Ohio—planeload of serviceman

from one of the armed forces. I don't know if it was the Air Force or not. This slotted parachute was something unknown, pretty much in the early days, to the rest of the parachute forces, and they wanted to come out and see that parachute in operation. So I was selected as one of the volunteers to jump one of those parachutes. So we went up in their big Air Force plane—big C-46 I think it was—and made a jump for them.

That's right, I made another exhibition jump I'd almost forgotten about. Paramount Studios in California came up, and they wanted to shoot a little news reel. There again, I got to [laughs] volunteer for this. These fellows want to...they set up a real scenario. They built a little fire under a big tree, and they wanted they wanted us to come down over the top of that tree—drape our chute right over that tree just above the fire. I was fortunate to do that very thing. [laughs]

[Break in audio]

KT: Were there other people involved in this exhibition for Paramount Studios?

EN: I think there was two of us, as I recall, I don't know who the other person was, but I believe there was two of us that were taken out with that assignment to land over the top of that tree for this special news reel. There was a fire smoking underneath. I jumped out of the plane and aimed for that tree and maneuvered the thing, and I draped my parachute right over the top of it just like they wanted it. I guess that sounds like boasting. It isn't special skill, but there's a lot of factors involved. The winds and everything that were in my favor. Anyway, it happened. Then, of course, we had a particular technique of lowering ourselves. You drape over tree, you're hanging on those risers. We had to have a special technique of raising ourselves and getting slack in here so we could unsnap ourselves. Well, we had ropes that we did that with. They followed me all the way through that whole procedure as I disconnected myself from my parachute and then came down with my rope, just like we were trained to do, and got down to the ground. That was one of the expedition jumps I made. I guess it was four of those that I had made then—four different times. So that's kind of fun. [laughs] Kind of highlights along the way.

KT: What did your friends and family think about you being a smokejumper?

EN: That's kind of interesting. My parents had some pretty negative feelings, but they really didn't stand in my way. My father probably expressed more than my mother did. They would have preferred I not have done this. I think they were a little concerned about the risk, but they didn't really do anything to stand in my way. They didn't encourage me. [laughs] I have two sisters and a brother, and nobody really tried to talk me out of it or discourage me about it. We encountered some opposition before I came up here. When I was in the camp in California, the neighbors—some of the businesses in the local little town—we heard expressions of feelings against us, but seems like there was some active feelings expressed too in a few occasions, but it wasn't anything very great. We weren't too concerned, and we didn't bother us. We didn't encounter anything of that kind up here, except, as I implied, two or three of the fellows. I think

it was mostly a matter of not understanding and not knowing, but I feel that we established a pretty good record here. I think, as I've implied, the men that came here were pretty sincere and committed to doing their job here. I think in all that we did, like working in between fires and through the winter in the parachute loft and all of these assignments that we were given, I think most all of the men went into that with a feeling of really applying themselves and making a contribution, rather than just being here and putting in time. I think that helped. I think we were received with a little more understanding as time went on.

KT: What kind of come camaraderie was there amongst the men?

EN: I think we had real good camaraderie in all that we did—in all of our associations—as I recall. There wasn't really any bickering or arguing that...Oh, I think we had a little, but I think for a group of men in the camp like this that, I'd say, it was very insignificant. I think we got along, and going out together like that, in a primitive area, where you're all by yourself in a fire, sort of draws you together and you depend on one another pretty much. I think these experiences had an effect on the whole camp. We just were sort of drawn together. I think we got along well. We were from quite varied backgrounds actually. I mentioned growing up in a church from childhood on. A lot of these fellows didn't have that kind of background at all. In fact, we were...Philosophically, I think, there was quite a difference in our thinking, and background and a purpose in being here even, and our outlook upon what was going on regarding the war and social issues and so forth. I think, even with the group that's here today, I think this shows up. Even above that though, I think we seem to appreciate each other and get along. We can get into discussions, and we understand and appreciate each other's positions. So I think that's kind of unique in a way. Of course, I like that. I think that's the way it should be.

KT: How do you think the experience as a smokejumper affected parts of your life later?

EN: Well, I've developed, over the years, a real interest in the outdoors and nature. I think this contributed much to that, because we got in to some beautiful backcountry where we were literally alone. There was nobody else for miles and miles. Completely dependent upon our own abilities and skills. Having a church background and being a Christian, I've grown a lot in my faith in God and in the Bible, and I think all of this has contributed to that. I look upon the Bible as the foundation for my life and my experience with the Lord. All of that is basic and very important. This distinguishes me from some of the other fellows here, as I've implied already, of course. This has grown...and my outdoor experience...I love to hike, I love to...I didn't have any college before I went into smokejumping. I got married about three years after I got home, I guess. Had three children and decided to go to college. [laughs] By that time, I was in my late 30s, you see, and I started college and was quite successful. Went right straight through and got a graduate degree. Started teaching. Then developed an interest in geology and led a Grand Canyon geology tour for many years.

I've taken hundreds of people down into the canyon. In fact, I did this year. The Park Service only allows a maximum of 16 people in one group. I had a full group this summer, and hiked

105 miles there in about two weeks and most of that was backpacking. So I've developed an interest in this line—an appreciation for nature and natural sciences. I have an undergraduate degree in zoology, and my master's degree is in education psychology. But that's sort of an odd degree for the experience I had, because I really did all the electives I could in botany and zoology. The interest in geology developed after that. So, after my graduate degree, I did some work in geology, but then I did a lot of work on my own in research and built up a library and attended seminars and did much hiking with geologists and talked to park servicemen and built up quite an experience. I led this group, and by the way, we offered college credit through South Pacific University for several years. Every night, we'd get in our camp, and we'd have a study, teaching experience together. This required a lot of preparation—a lot of work on my part—but I enjoyed it.

As I look back, and wonder how all this developed, I think this smokejumping made a major contribution in these interests and concerns and all of this. I might add that my interest in geology stemmed from a concern that developed in teaching. When I began to observe that all the materials we were using and teaching resource materials and the films and everything was presenting anything regarding nature from the evolutionary point of view, and I couldn't accept that. So I began to do research. Consequently—this is a long story of course—but I have been doing I've been speaking around. I put slideshows together, so my photography experience here has contributed that, and I've spoken to teachers and organizations and Sunday-school groups, high-school groups, and churches. I put slideshows together to go along with my presentation. This has resulted my concentrated study in geology, and Grand Canyon is a place to study geology, so I enjoyed this a lot. I spent many, many hours and lots of miles in this area.

KT: Are there any other particular fires or smokejumping experiences that stand out in your mind?

EN: [laughs]

[Break in audio]

KT: So do you remember any of these incidences?

EN: Yes, one once incident comes to my mind. We were called to a fire. This is when I was down in Idaho, as I recall, on the last fire season, 1945. A fire call came in, and two of us—our turn had arrived—so we were sent out to this fire. As we always...Before we leave the airplane, we pull our map out and pick some landmarks, because it's going to look different when we're on the ground. We try to specifically locate ourselves on that map and know where these landmarks are so we can orient ourselves, because we're back in primitive area. We all have to walk out a few miles before we get to it a place where they can pick us up to take us out. Well, we got down on the fire very well and went right to work on the fire. Had it out in, I don't know, probably 15 hours or so. As you probably know, we would go through our burn area with our bare hands, and every root that was down in the ground or under every log. When we left that

fire, we wanted to be as certain as we could possibly be that there wasn't any sparks or coals there that might flare up and reignite that fire. So, of course, this involves time. The actual putting the fire out didn't involve that much time, but by time we'd gone through that fire, it involves quite a few hours before we could be absolutely sure that it was totally dead.

Well, we had accomplished this, put our equipment all together, and then began to think about leaving—finding our way out. We'd be looking at a map, and we'd begin to realize that none of landmarks were in the right place. We just couldn't put anything together that made sense. Finally, we just simply concluded we were lost. We didn't know what to do. We finally, after quite a long time—trying to figure out what the situation was—we finally decided we just have to start down this canyon and that'll lead us down to something. We didn't know where we were or where this would take us, but it so happened, before we had gone very far at all, we'd heard somebody holler at us. It had turned out that the men in the plane—the spotter and the pilots—soon after they put us out began to realize, some way, they come to the realization that we'd made a mistake in the way we looked at our maps. I don't know exactly how this happened, but it did. So the instructions that we had agreed upon were just not right at all. We were really lost based upon what we knew and the map we had.

They came to this realization on their way back to the airport, so immediately they figured out where we were, and they sent a mule packer out with a couple horses to pick us up. He worked his way in close enough so he got within hollering range. By the time we had jumped and all this had transpired and we were trying to get out—I don't remember it was probably a day and a half or so maybe—he had time to get in there. He hollered across the canyon. Well, we had to pack our stuff quite a ways to get to where he could...He couldn't get in where we were with the horses, so we finally got it on his horses, and we got out and he led us out. Otherwise, I don't know for sure what would have happened. [laughs] Those kinds of things happen once in a while. I don't think that happened very often, though, because I think, as a whole, we were pretty accurate in our spotting and the use of our maps and compasses and all of that, but I know that one incident did happen. [laughs]

KT: Were there any memorable pack-outs?

EN: Well, there were occasions where we had to pack our equipment quite a ways to get to where the horses could come. Soon as they'd dispatch us to a fire, they would dispatch a packer in with horses, but by the time he got in there, you see we'd have the fire out and were ready to leave. That was the advantage of going in by parachute. We'd be that much earlier, because men going in by foot wouldn't be any earlier than this packer would be actually. We'd be in awfully rough country sometimes, and even though he came in to pack us out, we still might have to move our equipment quite a long ways. On the average, we'd have about 100 pounds per jumper, by the time we had our two parachutes—our backpack and our parachute and our tools and sleeping bag and canteen and some clothes and what all. It would add up to about 100 pounds, and it would be pretty awkward to pack very far. We didn't have backpacks, of

course, but we'd have to maneuver this stuff in. Sometimes, the horses could come up to where the equipment was, but sometime not.

Then sometimes after the horse did pick up our equipment, why, we'd have to walk quite a few miles. I don't know why, but I remember one occasion where we walked 12 miles out to get to the road where the pickup could get us, and the horses carried our equipment out. Now, in that case, we had a pretty good trail there, but sometimes you didn't have a trail. You might part of the distance, but that particular incident, we had a good trail to hike on which made it nicer.

Every fire was different, and you never knew. You'd go out on fire, and there was always this kind of anxiety and anticipation of what you were going to encounter but it was something we enjoyed. I really cherished these experiences. I was never really frightened. I never encountered any animals or anything on the fires. In Moose Creek Ranger Station there, before I was flown out, we got up one morning and we had tent cabins. You've seen these, I'm sure. They're built up off the ground maybe this high, and there's a board wall in the tent over the top of this and there's stair-steps, maybe four steps or so, leading from the ground level up. We got up in the morning to go out, and there was a rattler buzz right under these steps. He was a pretty big one. Kind of frightening, but we killed him.

Another occasion going up the trail not far from the ranger station just behind us, there was rattler right on the trail. We usually killed those. I don't know if I would today, but we did in those days. In Grand Canyon, that's a little different area, but I've been down there many, many times. Thirty-five total times down to the bottom of the canyon.

This summer, one of our people almost stepped on one. There's rattlers down there, but they're hardly ever encountered. We had one in camp one time, during the night, didn't hurt anybody. Two of them, in fact. There was two of them in the camp that night. So I've been around rattlers a little bit, but in that backcountry there's all kinds of things you run into that are, more or less, normal and natural, well, in a way.

For example, we were on a trail one day. Just off the trail, just a short distance, we saw a huge set of elk antlers, and we examined them and found telephone wire wrapped all around these antlers. Apparently, the poor creature, during the winter, the line had been knocked lower down with a falling tree or something, and he come along and got tangled in those and then just perished right there. Couldn't get himself extricated. We'd come across things like this occasionally in this backcountry, way back there. So some of the personal experiences.

KT: What's your feeling about the smokejumper unit today?

EN: You mean as it's grown and the way it is today?

KT: Yes.

EN: Well, I haven't had too much contact, and really...I'm hoping to stop by Missoula on our way home today and look around a little bit. Obviously, it's grown, and I think there's a need for such an organization. I think it really fills a need. These men can get into this backcountry quite quickly and safely and do a real job. They're using chemicals and various other methods now, but I think you still have to have some manpower in there to really get through the area and make sure it's out. It's a shame to go in...fly an expensive plane in there and use the manpower and go through the procedure of putting a fire out, and then have it flare up again. [laughs] That's kind of costly to have to repeat that. Of course, there's the risk of it getting out of hand and doing some real damage. It looks like, from what I've seen and heard, that the organization has really progressed and is far advanced to what we saw, and can no doubt do a better job even than we did. Good night, it was pretty new in those days when we got into it, and we learned an awful lot in those early years there. I feel privileged to have had a part of it at that time with the people we worked with. I haven't seen Ed Cooley for a long time. I'm looking forward. I sure hope I don't miss him.

We're planning to drive home as soon as we can and get away from here today. [unintelligible]

KT: Do you have any other comments you'd like to say about your experiences?

EN: I'll think of some later on probably. [laughs]

KT: [laughs] Well, I'd sure like to thank you for sharing this with us.

EN: It's been enjoyable. I appreciate the privilege of doing this, and I'm hoping I will have access to the final project, some way or other, when it's completed. When do you hope to have this completed?

KT: Probably within the next year or so.

EN: Will it be in a form that can be distributed? A book form or something? What will it be its final form?

[End of Interview]