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This transcript represents the nearly verbatim record of an unrehearsed interview. Please bear in mind that you are reading the spoken word rather than the written word.

Oral History Number: 150-002
Interviewee: Clyde P. Fickes
Interviewer: Charles "Milo" McLeod
Date of Interview: March 30, 1985
Project: Military History of Montana Oral History Collection

Note: Clyde Fickes was a First Sergeant in the Montana National Guard. His wife, Corrine Fickes, also participates in the interview.

Charles "Milo" McLeod: ...between Staff Sergeant Milo McLeod, 103rd Public Affairs Detachment, Montana National Guard, and Mr. Clyde Fickes. Clyde was a veteran of the Montana Guard in the early 1900s. You spent over 20 years in the Montana Guard [Montana National Guard]. Is that right Clyde?

Clyde Fickes: All around together, it was about that, yes. I wasn't too active, but they wouldn't take me off the rolls.

CMM: You're aware that possible recordings of this tape may be deposited in the Montana Historical Society—

CPF: Yes.

CMM: —the University Archives, and can be used for research by people in the future on the Montana Guard?

CPF: That ought to be all right.

CMM: Let me start out. When did you first join the National Guard?

CPF: I went to school in Ohio at Ohio Northern University in Ada, Ohio. A good friend of mine...he eventually became a friend of mine after a year or so. He was captain of a local National Guard company there for Ohio. He convinced me that I ought to go to camp with him, which is what I did. That's practically all I did was to go to camp with him in Ohio. I've forgotten now what year that was, but it was in the early part of the century.

CMM: About 1908, 1910?

CPF: Along in there someplace. I can look up more definite dates. Sometimes it takes me two or three days to resurrect some of this stuff.

CMM: If you'd like to talk more about the Guard sometime, maybe we could do this in future too.

CPF: That would be all right.

CMM: When did you join the Montana Guard?

CPF: I went to work for the Forest Service in...

Corrine Fickes: Nineteen-oh-seven.

CPF: 1907. I was already in the Guard. I think it was in 1905. I was still a member when I was transferred to the east side of the mountains along the Sun River.

CMM: Where did you join the Montana Guard? In Kalispell?

CPF: Kalispell, yes.

CMM: What kind of unit was that?

CPF: Just a company.

CMM: Infantry or cavalry—?

CPF: I'm trying to think if it was K or L. I just don't remember.

CMM: That was the 2nd Montana infantry regiment.

CPF: Yes. That was before 1910, too.

CMM: None of the Guard was used during the 1910 fire, were they?

CPF: Some were used, yes, but they were paid regular fire fighter's wages.

CMM: But the Guard wasn't called up and sent to—?

CPF: Not as a unit.

CMM: Not as a unit. Not like they are now.

CPF: Yes.

CMM: Sometimes, in a bad fire year, the Guard—a whole unit—will be called up and sent to the fire line.

CPF: I did go to the border with the National Guard. I belonged to company H. I was working in the power house then. They couldn't let me go right away until they got a substitute to take my place when they called me. I followed the Guard, the whole company, into Helena. When I got there, there was this fellow McCormick from Billings or Iowa City. He was organizing a cavalry troop. He talked me into going with this cavalry troop and made me top sergeant.

CMM: Is that right? Before that, you'd been in the infantry. You couldn't ship out with the Guard when they left because of your job. You got to Helena and they were forming this new unit. That was the unattached cavalry, troop H.

CPF: Yes. We never had a horse.

CMM: You didn't?

CPF: No. (laughs)

CMM: I was wondering about that. Did you have uniforms initially?

CPF: Yes. We went in civvies to the border. When we got to the border, they uniformed us. That's my recollection of it.

CMM: Was that at Camp Douglas?

CPF: What?

CMM: Was that at Camp Douglas, Arizona, where you went?

CPF: No, we were at...where the heck were we? I know I had quite a time, quite a lot of fun too. McCormick had practically...he just thought he had some military training. He'd belonged to the National Guard for a while. They weren't taking much of an active part, but when the war started, he got to take a troop of cavalry to Mexico. I was in Helena at the time. I was behind. I left Kalispell to supposedly get into Helena in time to go south with the company—company H. I missed them. He was there and he heard what my situation was and he feathered me to be his first sergeant, so I was all this time that I was on the border.

CMM: Was that group of cavalry made up of former Guard members or was it all green troops?

CPF: It was all green troops.

CMM: All green. What was the weather like when you left for the border? As I recall, you went down in October.

CPF: The weather was beautiful when we left.

CMM: When you left Helena?

CPF: Yes. Of course, the weather was good down there all the time.

CMM: What kind of uniforms did you have when you got down there?

CPF: We didn't have any when we got there and then they issued.

CMM: Were they the woolen uniforms or were they the khaki?

CPF: As I understood it, they were standard issue for the Guard.

CMM: You don't remember them being too hot for that climate, do you?

CPF: They never bothered me.

CMM: On your way down to the border, did you stop at any forts along the way—

CPF: No.

CMM: —or did you just go straight through?

CPF: All we stopped for, several times, was just to stretch legs. We were in a special train, I think, with a whole bunch of stuff going south.

CMM: All weapons were issued down there?

CPF: Yes.

CMM: What kind of weapons did you have, being a cavalry unit?

CPF: When we got down there, they switched us back to infantry (laughter) and called us a machine gun company. We used that new machine gun that has the round bit that sits on top of the chamber.

CMM: A Lewis Gun?

CPF: I think it was what they call a Lewis Gun. L-e-w-i-s?

CMM: Yes.

CPF: Yes.

CMM: It had that big barrel and that round can that sat on top.

CPF: That's right. We fired a lot of that thing. Some of the boys got pretty good at it, but for a fellow of slight build and not very strong, they were a rough gun to handle. So they became ammunition (unintelligible) carriers instead of shooting the gun.

CMM: How did you feel about being in a different unit: the unattached cavalry and then later the machine gun?

CPF: I kept trying to get back to company H, which was my original entry into the Guard. It just couldn't be arranged. Finally, I got sent home because I was too damn persistent.

CMM: You got sent home early, then?

CPF: Yes, I came home ahead of the troops. I was in Helena when they got back there. It was just to see who they were and so forth. During that time, the makeup of that troop had completely changed.

CMM: Really?

CPF: There wasn't a man in it that I knew really well. They were all new recruits or something. They were all discharged in Helena, too.

CMM: They didn't stay in the Guard.

CPF: I don't think so—not that I ever heard of.

CMM: As I understand it, the troops came back...most of them came back in October of 1916. Then the Guard was activated early in 1917 for the First World War.

CPF: Yes, I think so.

CMM: A lot of those people who went to Mexico had been discharged. Is that right?

CPF: Yes.

CMM: They probably didn't go to France.

CPF: At that time, I was fresh married and had a good job.

CMM: That was with the Forest Service?

CPF: No, I worked in the power house at Big Fork, [Montana] as an operator for several years. When 1907 came along, I went back to the Forest Service. The supervisor was...Paige S. Buckler. He had known me a long time. In fact, he lived in a house next door to my girlfriend's house, and I got acquainted to him. He had kids and they had kids. Through that contact, I got to know him pretty well. I married the girl.

CMM: When you were in Mexico, when you were on the Mexican border, did you eat pretty well?

CPF: Yes, the food was good.

CMM: Do you remember what kind of food you ate?

CPF: It was standard ration mostly.

CMM: They had field kitchens set up?

CPF: Yes.

CMM: So it wasn't combat rations, canned food, or...

CPF: No. I don't know what it was. It was something to eat. That's all I know.

CMM: What sort of activities did you do when you were down there?

CPF: We drilled every morning and did special things in the afternoon. We always had a good, heavy work detail: we were fixing camp or building a camp for somebody else; all that sort of thing.

CMM: Did you ever go out on patrols—

CPF: A couple times.

CMM: —against the Mexicans?

CPF: Yes. We had a few fellows who spoke Mexican. They generally got the contact jobs when we were going to go along the border on any kind of work. Our outfit didn't do very much of that. We were in camp most of the time just being friends. At least, that was my interpretation of it.

CMM: Yes, that would sound like it, especially if it was mostly made up of green troops.

CPF: It was. I'd say seven out of ten men sent down there didn't know right foot from left foot. As a top sergeant, I experienced that in a hurry.

CMM: How about your original company: do you know what sort of activities they took place in? That was Company H.

CPF: Company H was the original company. Then Company F was organized after...I've forgotten just when, but those were two of the companies that went to the border.

CMM: Do you know what they did down on the border? A lot of patrolling?

CPF: That's all any of us did, actually, was guarding buildings and points of interest and being drilled.

CMM: How did people in the cavalry unit, the later heavy machine gun unit, how did they get along with the other units for the Guard?

CPF: Pretty good. I don't remember that there was very much friction of any kind. It was hotter than hell. We spent most of our time in the...when we were really in training and maneuvering, you sweat to beat the devil. It was quite the experience.

I had belonged to the National Guard in several different states. When I went to school down in Ohio at the Ohio Northern University, they had a military department. The second year that I was there...every year they had a color contest. There was five companies. One company each year would be designated the color company. They had a drill contest, which would determine which company that would be each year. That's where I got my military training to start with.

When I came back home to Montana and joined the National Guard, right away they perceived that I knew my way around as far as company drill was concerned. The captain put me in the 1st sergeant job.

CMM: When you were on the Mexican border, do you remember the yellow jackets as being a big problem during (unintelligible)?

CPF: Yes. You had to be pretty careful where you stepped and where you poked your stick. We had a lot of fellows get burned with the yellow jackets.

CMM: None of the Montana Guard units ever really made contact or were in combat with the Mexicans, were they?

CPF: No. I don't recall ever...the Mexicans that I had anything to do with were friendly and were just trying to get the job done like I was trying to get mine done.

CMM: Did most people in the Guard see it as a pretty good time to go down to the Mexican border?

CPF: I think some questioned it and some of them didn't. Most of them just figured that it was something that had to be done and we were elected to do it and we were going to do it.

(phone rings)

CMM: When you were down there, did most people kind of enjoy it? Was it nice to get out of Montana and go to someplace different?

CPF: I think so. They got passes and went to town at night and saw the country. We did go out hiking around and maneuvering and that sort of thing. We got a good taste of the whole country there.

CMM: Did the Montana Guard...who did they stay with? What were some of the other states down there? Other Guard units? Do you remember?

CPF: Let's see...Frankly, I can't recall. There were some, I know, but what they were, I wouldn't say with distinction. I recall there was an outfit for Oregon.

CMM: I'd wondered if North Dakota or Wyoming, if they'd sent troops down there.

CPF: I think they were, but they weren't in contact with us. We were strung out along the border in various places. We were what they called convenient...camp a company or two and that's what they did.

CMM: Do you remember if you had pretty good support down there, as far as food, supplies, enough tents...?

CPF: We got plenty of food. All you had to have was cooks who knew how to fix it. Usually, a company could dig out two or three fellows that had some idea of how to cook food. That's the way it works with any military outfit as far as that's concerned. If your record shows that you have a little experience of tending the cook fire, then you get a job.

CMM: There wasn't a shortage on equipment or tents?

CPF: No, there didn't seem to be. We were a little slow getting it sometimes, but we got it.

CMM: Did you ever use pack mules down there?

CPF: What?

CMM: Did you ever use pack mules, being a machine gun company?

CPF: I never did in the army. I did a lot of it in the Forest Service.

CMM: In fact, you were the one who founded the Remount Depot, weren't you?

CPF: Yes.

CMM: The Remount Depot out at Nine Mile.

CPF: Yes, that was my baby.

CMM: To your knowledge, in the machine gun company, you didn't use a lot of pack mules down on the Mexican border.

CPF: I didn't see a mule. As I recall it, I didn't see a mule doing anything on the border.

CMM: It was all kind of an infantry operation.

CPF: Yes, it was.

CMM: Do you remember the names of some of the other people who went down to the border with you?

CPF: Golly, I knew both captains personally. There was two companies: F and H. I belonged to H. When they ordered (unintelligible), they brought me over. They needed a top sergeant. They stuck me in the job temporarily. When we were on the border, the politics began to work. Another guy took the job, and I was restored to the ranks. The captain and I had a little argument about something, and he took it out on my hide.

CMM: Is this the same captain who had asked you to come in and be the top sergeant?

CPF: Yes.

CMM: You did the job for him but had a disagreement, and he busted you.

CPF: That's right, but good. In fact, I demanded a transfer and got it. Went back to H.

CMM: Did you go back to H when you were on the border or after you got back to Helena?

CPF: Yes, it was on the border. I came home with H.

CMM: When did H come home?

CPF: It was the year after we went down there. We went down there...I don't remember for sure.

CMM: Do you remember what the weather was like when you came back to Helena?

CPF: (coughs) As I remember...Wait until I get a drink of water.

CF: I'll get it for you.

CPF: It seems to me we came back in the early fall—October or November.

CMM: Was there snow on the ground, or was it just cold?

CPF: I remember we saw snow when we came across the hump, but there wasn't any in Kalispell that I remember. I was leading horse from the railroad down to the old armory.

CMM: At Helena?

CPF: Yes.

CMM: When you got back, did they release you right away or did you have to stay around?

CPF: No, we were only there a few days. They got us out of Helena as fast as they could. Most of the people in our outfit were...they weren't like most of the company, where they came from one county or one city or board and things like that. They were a motley crew of all kinds. They scattered in four directions.

CMM: Some from White Sulphur Springs and Kalispell—

CPF: That's right.

CMM: —rather than one company that just came from Havre or whatever. Were you in the Guard in 1914, Clyde, during the Butte miner strike?

CPF: I was, but I didn't go to the strike. I was excused for some damn good reason or other. I didn't go. I offered to go, and they told me to stay home and take care of my job.

CMM: That was with the Forest Service or working for the power...?

CPF: Power company.

CMM: I've gone through the records and I've noticed, in Butte, they haven't had a National Guard company over there from 1913 until about 1954. They've had a Guard company in Helena, White Hall, Dillon, but not in Butte. Do you know if there was a lot of animosity toward the...?

CPF: There was. When I was in the Guard, if you went to Butte in a uniform and you didn't have company, you got everything done to you they knew how to do. I learned that pretty quick after I'd seen several fellows get cleaned up.

CMM: In Butte.

CPF: By the Butte gang.

CMM: What were these? Wobblies or...?

CPF: Some of them were.

CMM: Butte was a real strong labor town.

CPF: Yes.

CMM: A lot of animosity after, I would suspect, after the Butte strike.

CPF: I think there is yet. Right now.

CMM: It's interesting that they've never had a National Guard company in Butte until 1954.

CPF: They have one now, do they?

CMM: Yes. On the Mexican border, the commander that I found was a fellow from Butte named Dynamite Dan Donahue. Do you remember him?

CPF: I never saw him.

CMM: Do you remember hearing about him?

CPF: I don't remember any Donahue. I've even forgot our company...McCormick was our company commander when we went to the border. He was from Billings.

CMM: I think Donahue was the regimental commander.

CPF: Yes.

CMM: He was a Butte. He was an attorney.

CPF: Yes, he was from Butte. That was a peculiar part of it: the National Guard couldn't function over there, yet the commanding officer was a Butte man.

CMM: Did he drill in Helena?

CPF: I really don't know.

CMM: I thought that was kind of interesting too that the commander would be from Butte. Here's a picture of him.

CPF: I didn't see very much of any of them to be frank with you. I can't say for sure.

CMM: I know when I was on active duty in the army...I was in Vietnam in 1969 and '70. I never saw my commanding...the brigade commander more than once or twice: once when I got there and once when I left.

CPF: Did you do this?

CMM: No, that was done by a fellow named Richard Lacey. It came out in 1976, I think.

CPF: '76?

CMM: Yes. That's a history of the Montana Guard.

CPF: I haven't seen it, or if I have, I've forgotten about it.

CMM: When you were in the Guard, did you go to summer camps at Fort Harrison?

CPF: No...yes, we did. We went one year to Fort Harrison, but most of the time we went out to the coast.

CMM: You did?

CPF: Twice, I couldn't go because of my job and I didn't get there.

CMM: That's with the Forest Service?

CPF: Yes.

CMM: I have that problem too, working for the Forest Service. They want to go in July or August, and that's our busy time of year.

CPF: That's, as you say, the biggest time of the year for a man working with the Forest Service.

CMM: You say you spent about 20 years in the Montana Guard. You were in the Guard after World War One, too?

CPF: Part of the time, yes.

CMM: Was that in the Kalispell unit then?

CPF: Yes.

CMM: You retired from the Guard then, too, didn't you?

CPF: What?

CMM: Did you retire from the National Guard? Did you receive a retirement?

CPF: No. All I got was that my enlistment ran out and I didn't renew it.

CMM: Okay.

CPF: I don't recall—or I haven't seen it—ever receiving any particular papers about it. I may have and have forgotten about it, but I don't remember any.

CMM: When was the last year you served in the Guard? Do you remember?

CPF: It was the year after we came back from the border. I was transferred out of Kalispell. That was one reason for giving me a discharge.

CMM: Is that when you went over on to the east side?

CPF: That's when I took Bozeman on. The headquarters in Bozeman for the (unintelligible) ranger station was up at Cinnamon Creek on the edge of the...what's the name of that damn creek anyway? It goes up to the southwest corner of the park.

CMM: Southwest corner...not the Madison?

CPF: No, a branch of the Madison.

CMM: I'm not sure. I'd have to have a map. What did you mean when you said you took the town of Bozeman on?

CF: (unintelligible) He was made a ranger (?).

CPF: We were expecting a baby. We were tickled to death to get a permanent place in light of the time (?). I'm speaking of my first wife, of course. Mary Katherine was born there in Bozeman.

CF: We were down there last year (?).

CPF: I've got some stuff someplace that might produce something for you, but I don't know where the darn stuff is since we've moved. Quite a lot. I haven't looked at it even.

CMM: Is this stuff from the Guard?

CPF: Yes. It's that and related things that went on while I was in the Guard.

CMM: I'd sure be interested in seeing some of that.

CPF: I'll see if I can find something.

CMM: Would some of it be like old photographs?

CPF: Yes, it would be old pictures mostly and maybe a newspaper article. Some other stuff.

CMM: You'd mentioned once before that you went to summer camp once at Fort Harrison. What sort of things would you do at camp?

CPF: We had rifle drill in the morning some. In the afternoon...we did a lot of things...

CMM: A lot of target practice?

CPF: I remember doing this with the rifle.

CMM: Rifle exercises.

CPF: Yes. We did quite a bit of moving around. We went out and set up temporary camps whenever there was a possibility, just to get you familiar with how that stuff goes together.

CMM: A lot of target practice? Shooting?

CPF: Some target practice. Not as much as the commanding officer would like to have, but he used all the ammunition he could get. The year I belonged to the Pennsylvania National Guard, when I was back east, I went to camp with them. I had the same experience there.

CMM: They didn't have much ammunition?

CPF: They didn't have much ammunition. But they were hell for drilling and they sure give you the workout.

CMM: What kind of rifles did you have?

CPF: The 03 Springfield [M1903 Springfield].

CMM: The 03 Springfield?

CPF: Yes, the original Springfield, it was. I thought I saw one in here.

CMM: You weren't ever in the Guard when they used the Krag, were you?

CPF: Yes, we used Krag at Kalispell.

CMM: You did?

CPF: Yes.

CMM: When you went to the Mexican border, you had Springfields and Lewis Guns.

CPF: I think we did. They were issued to us down there. We were held up for about a week or more getting rifles. They were held up because the arsenal where they were built, back in Ohio or wherever it is, was just overloaded. It couldn't turn them out.

(pause)

CMM: Clyde, when you were in the Guard, did you have many other people who were veterans of the Philippines or did those people...when they came back to Butte, they were discharged. They got out of the Guard, but did any of them come back in and maybe go to the Mexican border.

CPF: I never knew one. If he was, he kept it to himself. I didn't hear him talk about it or hear anybody mention it.

CF: You see that?

CMM: That's nice. A sure sign of spring.

CF: It's early isn't it? At least I think it is.

CMM: You said you went to summer camps on the coast. Is that where you went, American Lake?

CPF: Yes.

CMM: That's Fort Lewis now. Then they had a Camp Murray, I know, during about World War II. What was camp like out there?

CPF: It was about how it would be anyplace. I didn't see any difference in it.

CMM: Was it kind of exciting to go out there rather than Fort Harrison?

CPF: There was new scenery to most of us from the flat country east of Butte. There was more people and the weather was different too.

CMM: Did it rain much when you were out there?

CPF: We got quite a bit of rain.

CMM: I went through basic training at Fort Lewis. American Lake. Infantry training there. I went in March of 1968 and I never saw the sun for two months. It was foggy and rainy. The sun came out in May. We saw Mt. Rainier. It was beautiful. I remember the forests were really thick. It rained a lot. Otherwise, the climate was pretty good. But a lot of rocks. I remember marching across these fields and there were these big boulders. Do you have any recollections like that, Clyde?

CPF: Not very much.

CMM: The Montana Guard has sure changed a lot, hasn't it?

CPF: What?

CMM: The Montana Guard has certainly changed a lot.

CPF: Yes.

CMM: It was showing in that book when it first started until now. A lot of different uniforms and a lot of different people. Different types of weapons. When you were in the Kalispell Guard unit...

CPF: What?

CMM: When you were in the Kalispell unit, did you have your own armory in Kalispell? Do you remember where you drilled?

CPF: I don't remember where we drilled. It was on North Main Street, I believe, near the railroad.

CMM: What would you drill: one night a week?

CPF: One night a week, yes.

CMM: You wouldn't drill on weekends.

CPF: Thursday night, I think, was our drill night.

CMM: What were they—about two hours or four hours?

CPF: Usually. They wouldn't last over an hour—the actual physical drill. The fellows might hang around for a couple hours afterwards, playing cards and talking and this and that sort of thing.

CMM: All of them showed up in uniform.

CPF: Most everybody wore his uniform drill nights.

CMM: How about in Helena? Where'd you drill?

CPF: What?

CMM: Where did you drill when you were in the Helena Guard?

CPF: I didn't do very much drilling. I think the reason was that I didn't have much transportation to move around. I may not have owned an automobile at that time. I would have to look up some of my personal stuff. I can't do that; I don't know where it is; stored around here someplace.

End of Side A]

[Side B]

CMM: This is an interview conducted on the 30th of March, 1985 by Milo McLeod and Clyde Fickes for discussion on early Forest Service activities. I have read your books, Clyde, the *Recollections* and on the *Early Days of the Forest* [*Early Days in the Forest Service*].

CPF: You read that, did you?

CMM: Yes, I have. There's a couple questions I was interested in. You designed the old L4 lookout didn't you?

CPF: What?

CMM: The L4.

CPF: Yes.

CMM: Where were most of those built? Where were the contracts let for them to be built? Columbia Falls? Spokane?

CPF: It don't come to me like it should. I know I had very little actually to do with it other than to see that the drawings were made and the necessary records and that sort of thing.

CMM: What's amazing about those L4s is a lot of them are still standing—very well designed, very well built. A lot of them are being torn down because they've aged, but it amazes me how they can—

CPF: You're talking about lookout towers.

CMM: —sit for 50 years and still be in relatively good shape. They get a lot of snow, a lot of wind.

CPF: I've got some pictures some place. Where the hell are they?

CMM: Did the CCC [Civilian Conservation Corps] build most of them?

CPF: What?

CMM: Did the CCC put up a lot of these lookouts?

CPF: Not very many.

CMM: It was mostly Forest Service.

CPF: The CCC boys couldn't do the work. That is, they didn't know how to handle the tools. It was an expert job to build one of those 40 foot towers with a 14 by 14 lookout house on top of it and the stairs and everything to get up and done. It's a complicated thing and it has to be put together carefully. We put them together and then set them on their feet after they were put together. You have to know what you're doing.

CMM: You would build the cabin first?

CPF: Sometimes. Sometimes you build them together. Most towers were built so you lived in it. No matter what the height was, you lived up there. You packed your water up there and so forth. There were still a few where they just had an observation tower and maybe a ladder to get to the top of it, and they lived in a regular 12 by 14 house.

CMM: Down at the bottom of the tower.

CPF: Yes, usually a log construction.

CMM: The L4s, the cabin on the 40 foot tower, those were mostly built by Forest Service.

CPF: Yes, all that I know of are built by Forest Service. Contractors wouldn't take the contract. How tragic (?). They didn't want to be bothered with it. Too many things that you had settle that didn't have anything to do with the carpentry trade.

CMM: Like what?

CPF: Conveniences and just putting the thing together, as far as that's concerned.

CMM: If you don't mind, I'd like to ask you a couple of questions about Nine Mile.

CPF: Yes, glad to.

CMM: When did you get the assignment to establish the Remount Depot out there?

CPF: I told about it in my Remount book. Have you seen that?

CF: Yes.

CMM: Yes.

CPF: That tells when we did all those things; started them. I don't remember offhand.

CMM: What kind of man was Major Kelley, Evan Kelley?

CPF: Major Kelley served with the big regiment in the war.

CMM: The big regiment.

CPF: The one that all of the foresters belonged to. What did he call it? Anyway, he ran an office job.

CMM: During the war?

CPF: No, it was either in Philadelphia, New York, or Washington. I think it was in Washington. He had some ideas about how we ought to put out forest fires and some of the other things we ought to do. Incidentally to that, we had to build a living (?) forest for people who did the work and we had to do a lot of other things: trails and roads and bridges and all kinds of things.

The major was all for doing these things, but he had absolutely no concept of how you take a saw and cut up a one-by-six board and make a privy out of it. Those were things that we had to do. If you didn't know how, that was kind of rough. That was the rangers' work. He had to depend on fellows like me to get the physical job done that he had to do, which he had no experience in.

We got to talking one day in his office about the number of mules we had and what to do with them and that sort of thing. I made the crack that we ought to have a central location where all the mules were and they could be distributed as needed and so forth. Then we got into...when the western office approved our doing something about it, then we got into breeding...we had a lot of mares that had been bought for various purposes, mostly riding. We were going to raise our own colts. I sat and listened to this stuff.

I was raised on a farm in Pennsylvania and there was a ranch up in Montana that I worked on. I associated with ranch people practically all my life. My father was a carpenter, contractor, and builder. As a kid, I learned to go to work with my father on Saturdays. He'd have me doing chores and taught me things I needed to know later on. That's what happened there. I had this idea that we would have a reservoir of mules and have packers ready to go and that sort of thing. He said, "You go ahead and do it." That's what happened.

CMM: That was about 1930, as I recall from your book.

CPF: Yes.

CMM: The CCC came in in 1933.

CPF: They came in just in time for us to put them to work.

CMM: They helped build a lot of the buildings at Nine Mile.

CPF: Yes they did. We had a 200 man crew up the hill there.

CMM: At Maynard?

CPF: At Maynard, we had a big...well, standard CCC camp for 200 men, and we worked them all around that area there. The remains of their occupancy are still there; at least they were the last time I was there.

CMM: There are some foundations up there where the camp—

CPF: Yes.

CMM: —used to be.

CPF: Where the mess hall was and stuff like that, they had a concrete foundation. They're still there.

CMM: There's the old smoke stack or chimney. Was it very hard recruiting packers to work at the Remount Depot?

CPF: To do what?

CMM: To recruit packers? To get good, experienced packers to work for the Forest Service in those days?

CPF: No, I don't think so. I think that quite a few men were interested in what we were trying to do and wanted to help work at it.

CMM: People like Bill Bell and—

CPF: Yes.

CMM: —Johnny Christensen.

CPF: Yes. If I had my old book here, there's a half a dozen others that we can't think of; some of them residents here. Bill...his folks own the ranch across the road from the Remount.

CF: Longpre.

CMM: Yes, Longpre.

CPF: Yes.

CF: He still has all his biographies...all of his books that he wrote. He has them all. His son wanted them, but I wouldn't let him have them.

CPF: Where is that book now, Corrine?

CF: Your *Recollections*?

CPF: Yes.

CF: I don't know where you put it, dear.

CMM: I was going to say, I can get a copy at the regional office. They'll send one out to you.

CPF: Yes, I'm sure you can.

CMM: I'll get one up to you.

CF: I know out at the Smokejumper Center, they like to have some of those for copies. Of course, a lot of it is personal, too, but at least in some of the stories in there, he's on his job. It'd be nice to have all his diaries (?).

CMM: It really would be.

CF: It would be nice if someone could go through and really get a portion of (unintelligible) all copied out.

CMM: Yes. Get that all condensed. That was a pretty exciting time for the Forest Service.

CF: Yes.

CMM: From what I understand. I wasn't there. The '30s, the CCC, the Remount Depot.

CF: My dad fought in the 1910 fire. He was stationed up in the Lolo Creek area for the Forest Service. A couple of my mother's friends were on the fire too. They had to lay in the river in order to keep from getting burned.

CMM: You were on the 1910 fire, weren't you Clyde?

CPF: What?

CMM: You were on the 1910 fire, too, weren't you?

CPF: Yes.

CMM: There were a lot of crews in those days, but were there many Wobblies on the fire crews?

CPF: Lots of them. We had them right in the fire crew.

CMM: Would they be good workers, by and large?

CPF: Too busy talking and arguing. You got rid of them when you could. You get to be 40 miles back in the woods and nobody else around but you and a couple of other guys, and they just take over. You can stand up and tell them what they have to do and that sort of thing, and they just look at you and tell you to go to hell.

CMM: Did you carry guns?

CPF: What?

CMM: Did you carry guns?

CPF: Yes, I carried a Luger pistol. I never had it out of the holster, but I had it on the whole time.

CMM: That was during the fire...?

CPF: The supervisor...somebody asked me about it one day. He said, "I don't think you should be wearing that thing."

I said, "Major, I wouldn't go out in the woods these days with these Wobblies the way they are without it."

He accepted my statement.

CMM: Where were you on the 1910 fire, Clyde?

CPF: What?

CMM: Where were you on the 1910...?

CPF: 1910 fire? I was working in the power house in Big Fork. (unintelligible) They called me out a couple times to give them some advice about organizing fire crews, but that's all I had to do with it because I'd gone down there...I'd gotten married and I had to have the job to continue

with that arrangement. I missed the 1910 fire season as far as actually working on a fire. I had to dole out a lot of advice to people: what to do and how not to do it, but that was it.

CMM: In the later seasons, say 1916, 1917...

CPF: I took the examination again and got reappointed. Now I'm retired again.

CMM: The Wobblies weren't very good on the fire line.

CPF: They wouldn't do anything except—

CMM: —talk about the eight hour day.

CPF: —Yes, the eight hour day and everything else. They'd stand and argue with the other fellow. It was rough. As soon as we found out who they were, we made every arrangement to get rid of them—sift them out.

CMM: I understand, up at Sevenac, when they first started planting trees up there and working at the nursery, that they'd end up with Wobblies on the crew. The same thing. Tried to get rid of them.

CPF: They did for a couple of years, but they gradually wore them out. The Wobblies killed themselves. They just went too hog wild and people got disgusted with them and wouldn't have anything to do with them. In a way, they were a good thing in the long run for the country.

CMM: Do you remember what it was like in the woods at all? In the sawmills and the lumber camps? The living conditions?

CPF: Most everything moved by horse power, or oxen in some places, but up here by horse and mule power. They finally developed something to move the logs into the mills. We had a big mill in Kalispell. Two of them, I think. There was one at Whitefish. Every here and there, some independent guy had started a saw mill and was making lumber.

CMM: The conditions in the camps were pretty tough.

CPF: They were in some places where either the supervisor or the camp boss didn't do his job, but where somebody took care to see that the men were fed and slept at night got along pretty good. It went on and then we got some careless guy who just didn't give a damn and we'd lose the crew. We didn't have those kind of things running around either—pickups.

CMM: No. (laughs) Now, almost every...

CPF: Now, they run everything out of the pickup.

CMM: Yes, it seems like the whole Forest Service operates out of a pickup.

CPF: Yes.

CF: It's costing the nation a lot more money than if we had a few horses and—

CMM: Yes.

CF: —old band wagons. That's where the ranchers are going to go, too, with all of this expensive equipment.

CMM: You need fuel for the expensive equipment.

CPF: Did you read the piece they had in the paper about my birthday?

CMM: Yes, I did. I see on the wall that you're an honorary chief of the Forest Service.

CPF: Yes, that was pretty nice of them.

CF: He's the oldest Forest Service retiree in the nation.

CMM: Is that right?

CF: I guess Max Peterson (unintelligible).

CPF: My father was the 13th of 15 children. When he was 65 years old, they were all alive except one boy who drowned when he was nine years old. That's my reason for being here.

CMM: That's good. You were out at the Nine Mile dedication, too, weren't you?

CPF: Yes.

CMM: When Max came out.

CPF: I haven't been out there lately very much because nobody asks me to come around.

CF: I take you out every summer.

CPF: What?

CF: I take you out every summer and ride you around.

CPF: We go out there and look around. I'll be frank with you: the last ranger that they had out there wasn't a very satisfactory host.

CMM: Really? Why was that?

CPF: What?

CMM: Why was that?

CPF: I don't know. He just didn't understand how to meet people.

CF: Who was that?

CPF: What?

CF: Who was that?

CPF: I can't think of his name now, but he isn't there anymore.

CF: Isn't he? I think he was really nice.

CPF: Yes.

CMM: What did he look like?

CPF: Golly...

CF: I can't think of his name.

CPF: I can't say.

CMM: Was he the ranger who was there during the dedication?

CPF: I only saw him but once.

CF: I think so.

CMM: That was in 1980, I think. That was sure a big day for the Forest Service: Max Peterson coming out; a lot of the old packers were there and yourself.

CF: He had planned to come for Clyde's birthday, too, and couldn't make it.

CMM: Max?

CF: Yes.

CMM: Costet (?) was there.

CPF: Huh?

CMM: Tom Costet was there.

CPF: Was he there?

CF: He's nice.

CMM: Yes.

CF: Very nice.

CMM: I didn't make it. I saw the piece in the paper. They had a ceremony for you at the federal building, didn't they?

CPF: Yes.

CF: That's where they gave him that.

CMM: Gave him that certificate?

CF: Yes.

CMM: What'd you after the Remount Depot, Clyde?

CPF: What?

CMM: What'd you do for the Forest Service after your time at Nine Mile?

CPF: Well...

CF: Maybe (?) in the office here. You came here in '29, didn't you?

CPF: What?

CF: You came to Missoula in '29.

CPF: I came to Missoula in '29.

CMM: You ran the Remount Depot from 1930 until after the war, wasn't it?

CPF: Yes, after the war, they took it away from me (unintelligible). There was some jealousy. That's what it was; along with some other new old-timers, I'll put it: fellows that weren't there when we actually built it, but who came in later and took over. They resented anybody that knew more about it than they did.

CMM: They also started the smokejumpers out at Nine Mile, too.

CPF: Yes. As far as the reason that it concerned Nine Mile is it is the central location. You've got four ways to get in and out of that place.

CMM: Four ways to get in and out. How's that?

CPF: You got east and west or north and south.

CMM: Okay.

CF: You've never done that?

CMM: I guess I'd never thought of it that way as Nine Mile being the center. You can go on to St. Regis and Idaho. You can go east to Butte and Helena.

CPF: You can go north to Kalispell.

CMM: Yes.

CPF: And Flathead Lake.

CMM: South down the Bitterroot and Salmon.

CF: You can go into Alberton and go across the river and right down...

CMM: Pattee Creek Road. Where would you go north? Over Siegel Pass or back to the Y (?) and up Evaro Hill.

CF: You can go down there and go on further west and then go up to Plains [Montana] and Paradise [Montana].

CMM: Plains, Paradise, and then up through Hotsprings. There's a direct way to Kalispell.

CPF: There's another road that we used to get through and I think they still use it. You go from the Nine Mile straight north and come out over on the reservation side.

CMM: Yes, from Nine Mile straight north. I don't know if that road's still open or not, but I know what you're talking about.

CF: Now you've got some summer things you can do while you're not working. (laughs)

CPF: We built a road to go out to the West End. We were by there when we went to...

CF: You go down the road to it and you come out at that springs. You come out by that springs.

CPF: You go through the Remount and take it straight west.

CMM: Over Siegel Pass?

CPF: Yes, you go down and come over and you come out on the north side of the Flathead.

CMM: Did you have anything to do with the smokejumpers when they were first starting out at the Remount Depot?

CPF: Not a great deal except to furnish them transportation.

CMM: How about during the war? I know during the war there was a lot of conscientious objectors that were in the smokejumpers.

CPF: Yes.

CMM: Did they stay out at Nine Mile in those days?

CPF: I think they did.

CMM: Do you recall if they were pretty good firefighters?

CPF: I don't recall anything about them. When you get down to that time, they had more or less taken the Remount away from me. They just smoked me out. So I wasn't paying too damn much attention to what they were doing.

CF: He went out and worked on that rubber plant, too, the guayule rubber plant in California.

CMM: No, I didn't know that.

CF: Then he was called out of—

CPF: What was that, dear?

CF: —the Forest Service and was called to sell war surplus after the war.

CMM: For the Forest Service?

CF: No, for the army.

CMM: For the army.

CF: He was down there at that rubber plant deal.

CMM: What was the rubber plant deal?

CF: The guayule rubber plant. I think that was a United States project. I can't remember. Can you tell about your rubber job?

CPF: What?

CF: Can you say anything about your work in the rubber plants in California? The guayule rubber plants. I can't remember the dates for that.

CPF: Where's my book about that?

CF: That's why the diary would be interesting to get to. He did such a good job with the selling and disposing of the war surplus that the president contacted him because he really got rid of—

[End of Interview]