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Interviewee: Marion Duncan and Beulah Duncan

Interviewer: Jane Reed Benson

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Jane Benson: I'm talking today with Mr. Marion Duncan, who is going...Mr. Duncan, I think the most helpful thing you could do for us today would be just to start by telling us what your job was at the Remount when you were there and we'll go from there. If you'll describe what you did.

Marion Duncan: If I start back at the first when the ranch was bought, I took the first load of mops, buckets, brooms, and paint out to clean up the old house.

JB: Is that right? I didn't know you went clear back to the beginning! I didn't know that. When they were first leasing the property and the old ranch was there?

MD: That's right, before the first ranger moved in.

JB: If you go back that far, why don't you describe what it was like right then, even before you went to work out there?

MD: This was a typical ranch, the Remount was. I was working in the warehouse here in Missoula and driving truck with all the fire equipment and whatever there was to do around the warehouse. I got acquainted with Clyde Fickes, who as you know had to set this thing up.

JB: Yes, one of the organizers.

MD: I got acquainted with him in '29 when they were leasing a corral down here in the middle of town for pack stock. I was raised on a ranch out in the eastern part of the state. He found this out so I would go down and help him load these broncs that he was hiring for pack stock in these trucks: pour them in, pull them in; anyway we could get them in there to haul them for fires.

JB: Was that during that bad season of '29?

MD: Of '29. This is how I got acquainted with Clyde. When he needed somebody to help him out somewhere, for some reason I seemed to be the one that would do this. This is how I come to go there the first time.

Beulah Duncan: That was when you went to work, too [unintelligible].

MD: Yes, I did, I went to work on the 13th of August...

JB: For the Forest Service?

MD: ...in 1929. From that on, of course, I was in and out. That fall, I was...we were sent out there, four of us, to build a garage for trucks, bunkhouse, stud corral, barn.

JB: Which fall do you mean now?

MD: 1929.

JB: Okay. '29.

MD: This was...the fellows with me was Leonard Townsend, who worked his early years in the Forest Service, a fellow by the name of Al Johnson, and Joe...

BD: Flackman (?).

MD: Flackman. The four of us went out there and built these buildings, getting ready for the crew that would be coming in during the winter. They already had a bunch of new saddle horses in there. Walt Perry, an old-timer here in town, was breaking these horses to ride. He was there with us.

JB: Was this out at the...?

MD: This was at the Remount Depot.

JB: At the Remount. That would have been when they were first leasing that property, I suppose.

MD: I don't know for sure just when they actually bought it.

JB: It wasn't purchased until two or three years later. The reason I was curious was I had thought that during the winter of '29 and '30 was when they were talking about this and still going out and trying to find a proper place, so I was wondering if it was '29 or the fall of '30, actually, by the time you would have gone out there. Then...

BD: That was '32 when you went out there to do that.

MD: Was it? Well...

BD: That wasn't '29 because you drove truck and that was with...

MD: Yeah, you may be right...

BD: Because it was '32...

MD: ...but I don't quite agree with you. The reason I don't, I think I saw in here one time...This is the book that...This is 1930 and...

JB: Is this Mr. Fickes' book?

MD: Yes.

JB: Yes, I've read all of his accounts there.

MD: There's a picture in here of the old place. The reason I am sure it was '29: right there it is. No, I'm wrong, it's 1930. It shows a pack string here with back at the old building.

JB: I think fall of '30 was when they first got started.

MD: Then we'll say '30 instead of '29.

JB: Okay. That's alright. So I didn't mean to...

MD: I think that was right too for when I actually went out there because I doubt if they built any permanent buildings until they owned it.

JB: Yeah, right.

BD: You were driving truck and going to fires in 1929 and then you worked in the warehouse all winter.

MD: That's right. I was a warehouse man then.

JB: When you four people went out, let's call it '30...

MD: I think it would have been.

JB: ...was this to rejuvenate some of the old buildings that were out there or were these new ones, these new buildings?

MD: No, it was decided already that all of these old buildings would have to go. Our first bunkhouse was a forest lookout building like they'd put on top of a mountain. The building sets now down in the back of someone's house down the road from the Remount. The garage, the first garage we built, sits up on the hill towards what they used to use for a dump up there, near where the big hay shed is now. It was moved out—this stuff had to go when they really put in all the new buildings.

JB: Do you mean that you built buildings that were just temporary and then moved out?

MD: They were used someplace else, moved. Actually, they became, in a way...like where we put the garages is about where the Lolo office is now. This is why. When they moved them, they just took them wherever they could be set up permanently again on the ranch. They all stayed there. That little bunkhouse was moved out by the blacksmith shop. Bill Bell, the old saddle man, used that for...just a storeroom for leather and materials and stuff. The stud barn stayed. It was built just like it is.

JB: That must be the one that's still out there. What was this about delivering mops? [laughs]

MD: This was an old farmhouse and, of course, they milked a bunch of cows and had the cream separator in there. It was kind of scraped up here and there. Naturally, when you're moving into a place, you're going to want it all cleaned up in way. I don't mean that it wasn't livable;

they just wanted to really clean it up. This is how I come to take this bunch of stuff out there. I don't know who they hired to do it.

JB: [laughs] You didn't do this?

MD: I didn't have to do the mopping. I could always remember these three or four tubs and thinking, as I went out there, this place must be in an awful mess if it's going to take all this to clean it up. But it wasn't really that bad.

JB: I think it was three or four years before they started construction on the permanent buildings.

MD: This was right.

JB: I think it was about '34.

MD: That's right. It was—the water line and the whole thing. We had a good time out there. The weather was horrible. It rained a lot, miserable. We had a cookhouse—this was hired. Fickes hired somebody in town, carpenters, to come out and build a cookhouse. That was a nice little building. In one end was a little bedroom for a cook. Our first cook was Mrs. Mose Longpre.

JB: I talked to Bill Longpre. Would this be his mother?

MD: This is his sister-in-law. She was a wonderful little cook. I always gave her a bad time a lot, but she could always stay pretty even with us. There is one thing I never will forget. Mose Longpre lived right across on the old ranch there, with his father and mother at the time, across from the Remount, which is part of that big ranch of...

JB: Moore's.

MD: ...Moore's, now. He used to bring the butter and eggs and milk over. Of course, we'd tease her about this. The reason he liked to do that was because they were young and he really had his eye on her. One evening, he came over, and she was all excited. At dinner that evening, she was telling us that Mose had bought a new automobile and he was coming over that evening to take her for a ride. He came over and went in the cookhouse. Three of us fellows went out and jerked the back end of the car up in the air and stuck a block under the axel so that one wheel would be off the ground.

They went out and got in the car and were both chattering. Mose started the car and it wouldn't go anywhere. He kept getting on the throttle and the old car started rocking. Finally, it jumped off this block and they run into the corner of the old woodshed with his new car!

JB: [laughs] Did he ever work out there?

MD: No, Mose had the misfortune of losing one arm in an accident. He never did work there. He could have. I mean, he could do anything anybody else did. About this time, he was getting

this ranch started up Petty Creek, which they developed into quite a place after they got married, which they did later. But Bill was there right from the start.

JB: Yes, I've talked with Bill. He's told me some about that.

MD: He was a wonderful fellow and a good man around there because he knew the ranch and knew everything.

JB: In these early times, then, what was your job? Were you stationed out there yet?

MD: No, I was just temporary. I was still in the warehouse in Missoula, and driving truck, and whatever there was to do. In fact, all the warehouse men, most of them I should say, did this same thing. If there was a load to take somewhere...there was three of us that did most of the driving, but if we were pressed for more, any of the fellows around could drive the trucks that they had there.

JB: Did you deliver a lot of supplies then out to the Remount?

MD: Yes, quite a lot, until they actually started the development of the big thing, and then it was all hauled out on big trucks, all the materials. It was just contract jobs, I remember, so whoever built it—and I don't remember who they were anymore—probably hauled all the materials themselves.

JB: What were you doing during the time when they were building those new buildings and fixing up the grounds, really getting the thing going? Where were you?

MD: I was either in the warehouse in about '32, '33...As they began to accumulate more trucks, I, for some reason, was assigned the job of keeping these trucks running and seeing that they were taken care of. That's when I began to get away the warehouse end of it. Later, we rented what was called the Southside Garage over by the Hellgate High School on Higgins Avenue: a big garage there where we kept all the travel cars. We had facilities there for washing small trucks. I had a service crew there that took care of it, a couple of mechanics for minor work.

JB: I never knew about that garage. I guess that's before my time. Was the high school there then, too?

MD: Yes, this building now is right by that flower shop from there toward the corner. There's three or four shops there now.

JB: Yeah, I know where you mean. The Bitterroot Market?

MD: Yeah, just the other side of that.

BD: Bunch of stores [unintelligible].

JB: Yeah there are. There's a lot of them.

MD: Even after later on when we got the big trucks, we kept them in there until we got the big garage built out at the Remount.

JB: When you say big trucks, do you mean those specially designed ones?

MD: Yeah, the Kenworths.

JB: I'd like to know more about those. Tell me anything about those trucks, whose idea it was, who designed them, everything.

MD: There were all the fellows that hauled stock. We had these little light trucks and we put a saddle horse or five mules in one of them, and they'd beat you to death going down the road. If they didn't like the ride, they'd rock the truck. The only way you could straighten them up and make them ride was just slam on the brake. You had to spook them until they'd get up there and get a little rigid. Then you'd go like hell there for a ways and when they'd start rocking again, you did the same thing to them again.

JB: They didn't like riding the truck?

MD: A lot of them didn't. Of course, when you were...unless you were on straight roads, you didn't do this. If you had curves and such, you drove accordingly. We all felt that...I had a fellow working for me there in the Southside Garage, a fellow by the name of D. Stewart. He was an old logging driver. In fact, he had hauled logs for himself. He had his own truck. He had a real good idea of what the gears and a motor should be for a truck that could really move out on the highway and still something that had lots of power. I wanted a sleeper cab on these trucks because I could think of the many times that you'd drive 24 hours without ever quitting. Sometimes you could take a relief driver with you, but he would be as tired as you was because there was no way to sleep. We really beat this thing around that the winter of '33 there, and came up with this, and then turned it over to the engineering department. They took it from that.

JB: The Engineering Department of the Forest Service?

MD: Yes. That, I guess, was under Fred Thieme at that time. There was another Duncan by the name of George Duncan. He was the one that actually we worked with in this engineering department. Some of the things we wanted, like power steering, on them, they didn't know what that was, so it didn't mean anything to them. There was different things that we didn't get. The first one that came out, the body was built on this truck in Seattle, where they got the truck.

JB: Kenworth Company, right?

MD: Yes.

JB: Who actually went out to Seattle to talk to the Kenworth people? Who in the Forest Service?

MD: I would say Bradeen, who was the purchasing agent at that time, would have. I was out there with him once or twice.

JB: Were you?

MD: Yes.

JB: I believe Cap Evans told me he went over there, too.

MD: I think Cap might have been out there. I was trying to think. Cap was another one that had a real good idea of...what he thought we wanted, but he wasn't a truck driver. This was a big fight we had as we tried to get something we could handle this stuff in.

Anyway, they bought this first truck and the body was made out of aluminum. They was going to have it light. The first time we put a bunch of mules in that thing with their shoes on, they tore the sides out of it, which made me very happy and the other drivers because we had designed it a little different. They had to bring it in the shop right away and put these, what we called "kicking plates." It was just a steel plate up high enough that when they hit it their feet would just go back down on the floor. Very simple thing, but we had to prove that it had to be in there.

That winter...that would have been '33, we bought that first one. I didn't like the gear shifts or the transmission in it at all, although it did alright. Again, the Engineering Department was trying to cheapen up a little. They could get this—it was made by the Mann Transmission Company, and we wanted Brownline (?) transmissions in them along with the straight transmissions which we got from then on. After we had them, we could prove to them that it wasn't quite right, so they bought two more. Dave Pronovost, who was the old blacksmith, and his crew built the next two bodies out in the Forest Service shops out here.

JB: They weren't aluminum? [laughs]

MD: No, they sure wasn't. They could take it. It's a good thing because we turned them all over sooner or later, road sliding out from under us and such, and spilling the stock out. You could tie a log chain or cable, whatever, to the top of them and turn them back up on the wheels and get them to go again.

JB: Altogether, there were three of those big ten-head trucks, is that right?

MD: Yes, that's right.

JB: What was the horsepower rating on them? I run into two different figures when I read things about them. What do you recall?

MD: I can't remember...they were Hall-Scott motors. I would suppose they would be about 200 possibly 300.

JB: One place I read 450. It said that they were the largest gasoline engines made at the time. Someplace else I read 250.

MD: They would either be 250 or 300.

JB: That would be more like it.

MD: Yes. If they had been diesels, they might have produced 400, but they weren't. They were gas. We wanted diesel, but there was a reason for their not getting it because you'd be back in the backcountry, a hundred miles from no place, and you couldn't buy diesel and you could get gas. That was the big argument from our people that they should make them gas. When they'd haul, when the tanks were full, they had a 40 gallon tank and a 60 gallon tank, so we had 100 gallons of gas and that would run you all night.

JB: Each truck had two tanks on it?

MD: Yeah.

JB: Were they difficult to drive?

MD: The biggest difficulty was that...Not on a highway; it was a beautiful truck to drive on the highway. We used to run races with the highway patrol [unintelligible]. I liked going from here to Yellowstone Park. We used to average 50 MP. On the roads then, the average 50 MPH, this meant when you got a straight piece of road 100 yards long, you gave it all you had. I liked here from Bozeman. You could drive 60 to 70, if the stock could stand it. You could choke them down if you drove too fast: air coming into the nostrils too fast and they'd start sticking their heads up in the air and they'd choke and start floundering around. We got so we knew the minute that this was happening. Otherwise they set in the...the faster you drove, the quieter they were, until they'd start choking down. We'd have to slow down for a while and let them get the air back in them. To drive over there at that average, you really had to plug along. Of course, coming back, they had a double overdrive in them. The speedometer only showed 70 and you could rabbit on past that quite a ways.

JB: Wow. that must have been something to see that going down the highway. [laughs]

BD: No speed limits. [laughs] No freeways.

MD: We didn't do this if there was cars on the road. We could actually do this at night more than in the daytime, when there wasn't as much traffic. If you passed a car or met a car going that fast, you'd jerk them clear over behind them and we were always afraid we'd wreck somebody. We'd slow down when you met anything, but otherwise you'd just set there and let them go. They drove just like a car. They had a wonderful seat in them. Heavy on the wheel; you had to be awful careful on the steering wheel.

JB: How many wheels?

MD: These first ones only had a straight axel, one axel, with dual wheels under them. They later revised them and put tandem axels under them. When we bought them, they were just a long wheel base, heavy frame, axels, and wheels.

BD: They were [unintelligible].

JB: Yeah, I've seen photographs of them, but nobody's ever described in detail what they were like on the inside to me. Was there a sleeping compartment there?

MD: It had a Pullman sleeper in them. It was a beautiful bed. It laid awful nice, but you slept right over the motor, so you didn't sleep on your back for very long. You'd have to move because you feel like you were getting on fire. This was improved later, on the next two, of getting more ventilations into this sleeper. We padded them different. We put a false bottom onto the mattress so that there would be an airspace there.

The first one...that first truck was kind of claimed and driven most of the time by Monty Peyton, who was the ranch foreman out there later on, too. It suited me fine because my old truck was 389. I'll always remember that. That was one of the second trucks that was bought the following year when they bought two more. Leonard Townsend had another one that was just like that. He was the permanent driver on that truck. We had a lot of driving just coming in and going out, which happened many, many times. If there was anybody available that we could trust, they'd send a relief driver along, and we'd tried to get a little sleep.

JB: Do you mean to say then that...did you go to work the Remount Depot finally as a truck driver? Is that what you're saying?

MD: No [laughs].

JB: When were the occasions that you happened to drive?

MD: In the summer. During fire season, as you probably already know, they kept ten pack strings.

JB: Yes, right. I've had that described to me.

MD: In the summertime, I was in this shop here in Missoula. In the summertime, I was sent out there during fire season...sometimes ahead of fire season. I would stay out there until the fire season was over. My [unintelligible] out there was, again, that these trucks were kept in running order. The drivers worked for me and Ed. Ed MacKay was the superintendent during that time. This was even so when Cap Evans was there, too. I would go out a lot of times. After Ed went out, I was out there every summer. We never lived out there to stay until we came back from the [unintelligible] project.

JB: That would have been?

BD: '44.

MD: '44.

JB: What was your title? Did you have a title?

BD: When you came back, you were a ranch foreman.

MD: As I remember, down here, I was a warehouse man. When I came back to the Remount after the war, the first was ranch foreman. They changed that to assistant superintendent. It was all the same work. [laughs] It didn't seem to make much of a difference.

JB: I guess it doesn't matter much. During the later '30s, when Cap Evans was out there, were you still going out just during the fire season to maintain trucks?

MD: Yeah.

JB: You weren't stationed out there?

MD: No, actually we were stationed there quite a short time for the amount of time that I put in the summers out there.

JB: One more thing about those trucks. It was someplace I ran into an account of a demonstration at a county fair up in northern Montana. Did you ever go along on any of these and how often did they do that?

MD: Again, this most of the time was Bill Bell, which you'd been told all about. He was the packer and Monty Peyton was the truck driver. They both liked to dress Western and were Western men. They were raised in these hills and they could put on a good show. I only went with them one time up to Hamilton. They could load a regular 25 man fire outfit on a string of mules of Bill's in mighty short order.

I don't remember the time anymore, but they just kept breaking their own records. I don't remember where it was at, whether this was Great Falls or someplace, a couple of packers, probably had a couple too many beers, thought they could...they'd like to challenge them. They said yeah it'd be alright. They could set the price. I think these fellows thought that 25 dollars would be a pretty good amount for the contest. Old Bill said that was hardly worth his time. If they wanted to make it 100 dollars, they'd go.

Then he told the fellows, he said, "Where are you going to get your pack stock?"

They said, "We're going to pack yours."

Bill said, "Not while I'm around you won't! You get your own pack stock." Finally, they agreed to let them try to load Bill's string. They couldn't even lift some of the stuff on. I don't think any money changed hands. [laughs]

JB: Was this out at the fair, I mean, in front of the grandstand, in front of everybody? Or was it a private thing?

MD: I think it was after they did it, after they put on their little show.

BD: Would you like a cup of coffee?

JB: Sure, thank you. That would be nice. But they didn't actually exchange money.

MD: No, they couldn't have beat him anyway tried because they knew just exactly how to pick up each one of these bundles. A new man, he'd wrestle it all over the area before he could get a hold of it so he could pick it up. Then, to try to hold it up on the side of the mule while you tied it on, that was the trick.

JB: Must have been tricky.

MD: Yeah.

JB: Did they put on these demonstrations quite a lot during the years?

MD: Yes, they did. Every year they'd...it would be down here...

JB: Thank you. No thanks.

MD: ...at Hamilton. Great Falls liked it. It went over big in Great Falls. The reason it wasn't done more I think about the 4th of July or along in August, when they were having most of the fairs: we didn't want those trucks that far away from home.

JB: I was going to ask about that. Same season.

MD: I remember one time right here in Missoula. I brought the string in that time just to lead...

[End of Tape 1, Side A]

[Tape 1, Side B]

MD: Cap Evans was superintendent at the Remount. Just as the paraders were about to start...

JB: Was that here in Missoula, did you say?

MD: That was here in Missoula. Generally, they'd start up by the NP [Northern Pacific] Depot and come back through. Just as the parade was about to start, somebody came up to me and said, "They want you over at the warehouse." I said, "Well, I haven't got time. We're about to have a parade." He said, "You're not going to have a parade. You're going to a fire." So I said, "You mean they really want the truck over there?" He said, "Yeah."

So they had...The office here had called Cap at the Remount. They had a fire going up by Plains [MT] and they wanted a 100 man outfit up there. This is a pretty easy load for that big truck, so he said sure. I missed the parade and wound up going to Plains, and getting back some time in the middle of the night. I don't remember when. I kept worrying about Bill, but they had sent two small trucks from the Remount in to pick him up.

JB: He went on that fire, too?

MD: No. Just from the parade to take him back to the Remount. To get him out of town.

JB: Yeah.

MD: This wasn't uncommon to do this, to use these trucks to haul fire equipment as well as stock. Many times when we would be done in the Clearwater country, we'd take pack stock down there to fires. They'd catch us someplace along the way and send us back through Spokane. We'd pick up fire equipment and haul it back to the warehouse in Missoula.

JB: As long as the trucks were out anyway?

MD: Yeah. It had just saved hiring other trucks or they got it in here faster that way probably. They wasn't just strictly stock trucks. In the fall, we hauled hay to the winter range with them.

JB: Did you? When the stock was loaded up...I had some of this described to me and I've seen some photographs, but there's a lot of details I'm never going to know because I didn't see it. In some of the pictures, I see a kind of face mask with goggles on the mules.

MD: That's what it is.

JB: When was that developed and what for?

MD: I think about...Right away, probably '34. For those mules, standing up there in the back facing that wind and the bugs, it's just like a person riding a motorcycle down the road without goggles on. If they weren't on, then we'd have an animal that their eyes would start watering and would be sore. Naturally, you do. This was what was happening.

I can't remember who designed the goggle, I really don't, but I know Leonard Townsend, this truck driver, was one of the men that made them. How he come to do this...He's a truck driver out there, remember, at the Remount and they lived out there near the Remount. In the wintertime, he worked in the warehouse and he was one of the men that did all the patching of tents, when they used tents, and bed rolls, and all this kind of stuff that were ripped and torn.

JB: In other words, canvas.

MD: Yes, he was a canvas worker and a good one. Another reason we wanted him to make them instead of a factory somewhere: he knew what we wanted, like the strings that they tied them on with. He made them out of better material. They were sewed on better: patches behind and all this.

JB: They were made of canvas?

MD: They were made of canvas, except for the eyepiece which is made of leather. That was put on with round rivets, from a regular machine that they had in the room where they made pack sacks. So both sides of this rivet was smooth. If they happened to get the goggle twisted a little, there was nothing on there that could dig them and scratch them.

JB: What was the goggle part made of? Glass?

MD: Isinglass. If they jammed it into something, they might crack it, but they wouldn't shatter it.

JB: How did it fit on the mule's head then?

MD: There was two holes in the top for their ears. That was the place it went: right over the ears, and came down around their nose and back; there was a string back here, a tube over their neck. When they were tied down, they were snug and the wind couldn't get up in them. The stock rode probably 40% better with them on than they did without them.

JB: I imagine they did.

MD: Because they were always throwing their heads fighting that wind.

JB: Did it take some getting used to?

MD: It didn't seem to bother them, no, even colts. About every string had at least one mule in it that it was a first year for it. That's the only way they could keep building up strings was to keep breaking new ones all the time. It didn't seem to bother them. In fact, they kind of liked them I think.

JB: They probably...Maybe after a while they began to realize it was helping them out.

MD: I think so.

JB: When the mules went into those trucks then, I've had it described to me how they were loaded in, but I'm uncertain as to what held them in place. Was there a division between the different rows of mules in a truck? What was in between the rows?

MD: There was a solid gate.

JB: Solid?

MD: You opened this gate around...it had to be so they couldn't get their legs back through if they kicked at the other mules behind them. It was a good idea that it be solid, so that they didn't kick you on the shins when you tried to get behind them. You put in four head and where each one went, like there was going to be a mule here, there was a loop made here about that big on each side and there was a tie down.

JB: You're talking about up in the front, very front?

MD: The front row. That was thrown over their necks so that they couldn't rear up and stick their feet over the front end and climb out on top of the cab, which we had happen a time or two, even with them...They were tied in and the gate was closed behind them. This gate swung all the way back against the side.

These were the little things that had to be designed so that the mule didn't get cut or torn as they were going in. This gate was closed in behind them. Our old blacksmiths made a real fancy—not a fancy—but a good latch type hook. It came onto the handle and come down on top of that gate and no way a mule could ever raise it. You wasn't fooling around there. You put in four and you had four more coming right at you, so you closed this gate and got out of the way while they was getting more mules in. They came in and they were just tied to the top of the gate.

JB: That's what I was going to ask: how did you tie the second row of mules?

MD: There was a rail about that high on top of this gate with a wrought iron pipe. You'd just tie them down to that.

JB: From their halters?

MD: Yes.

JB: They had a halter rope and that was tied down close?

MD: You'd give them, not slack, but they could move their head back and forth.

JB: How much is that?

MD: How much slack? It depends on how they rode. If they was fighting trying to get out like the ones on the outside, you'd tie their head down as close as you could get it.

JB: I hear the ones on the outside didn't like it. Is that true?

MD: Some of them didn't. They didn't like to ride on the outside. They was afraid of what was going by all the time. I turned a load of mules over one time up at Plains, right on a straight road.

JB: What happened?

MD: There was an old mule riding in the trailer. I had 24 head on: 12 in the front and 12 behind. This old mule had been fighting all the way from the winter range, trying to keep her in the truck. We stopped in Plains about 6 o'clock in the morning and ate breakfast and took off. We were going to Trout Creek or somewhere down there, hauling the Coeur D'Alene stock. I looked back in the mirror and she had one front foot out over the side, so I thought, well, I'll let her ride there that way a little while and I'll go back and put her back in.

The next time I looked, she had them both out. I stopped, went back, and got her back down in there, called her a few names, tied her head down closer, got back in the truck. I hadn't hardly got in high gear and I looked back and here she had both front feet out over the side again. I thought, well, I'll just let you just jump out and stretch your neck a ways, and that would probably either kill you or get you so you'll ride.

About that time the truck went...there was fill on the road down through that area. It was awful sandy. While I was gawking back at her, I got the front wheels off of the oil portion of the road. When it did, it just dropped right to the axel and up through the ditch I went, turned the truck over, but it didn't turn the trailer over she was riding in. [laughs]

JB: She was way back in the trailer?

MD: She was in the back end of the trailer.

JB: That wasn't fair.

MD: When the dust cleared and I happened to think about her, she's standing down in there, just looking around, enjoying the light. [laughs]

JB: Were her front feet still over the end?

MD: No, she had backed down in the truck...

JB: What happened to the mules in your truck?

MD: They didn't get hurt much. One of them...we got in and untied them just as quick as we could.

BD: You haven't told her that there was another load of stock with you.

MD: Leonard Townsend was following me with another load. We got in and untied them and tried to get them off of the top of each other. The saddle horse that was riding on the outside on the low side of...He was really knocked out and still tied, laying there just as quiet. We got the mules all out of the way.

I walked up behind this old horse and gave him a kick in the rump and I said to Friday, "I suppose he's dead, probably got his neck broke." When I kicked him, he raised his head up and started looking around. We got him untied right quick. He had a great big knot right over his eye. He just got knocked out when he turned over.

One of the mules, I suppose, got upside down some way in the scramble and another one skated across his belly, and cut a chunk of hide loose about that far on each side. It was hanging down, so we didn't know where we could get a hold of a vet and it had to be sewn up. We had been hauling oats in sacks to the winter range in this truck. We had a bunch of binder twine and a sack needle there about that long. We turned that little old mule upside down right in the middle of the road and tied his feet together; sewed him up with binder twine.

BD: I thought you were saying it was the horse that was injured.

JB: No, that was the one that got hit on the head.

BD: Oh.

JB: You sewed him up out there.

MD: Yeah, nothing on it, just sewed him together. We finally got the truck back up on wheels and got the sand scooped out of the side. It had about a ton of sand in there, clear back into the sleeper behind where I was setting.

JB: From the shoulder of the road?

MD: Yeah, where it went over and just slid right down. We was there about two, three hours, I guess, getting out, getting straightened out, and reloaded. We got on down anyway to Noxon that night, where we was going to unload them. I told the fellows there that were after them to be sure and watch that mule. When they got over to the ranger station where they were going back over the mountain, it wouldn't hurt if they got a vet in there to look at him probably. I said, "I don't think you can pack him for quite a while."

They said, "Okay."

The next...that fall, when the stock came in, I happened to be down there to haul them in. I recognized this little old mule coming down the trail. When he got down there, I went down and took a look. Here's right where we sewed him, where the spots were where this big old needle went through, all white hair. I said to one of the packers, "How long was it before you started packing that mule?"

He said, "Oh, a couple days after we got him up there." He said he never did get sick.

JB: Good heavens. Healed right up didn't he?

MD: [laughs] Yeah, but he always had that mark on him. Getting back to the loading in stuff. When the last mule went in, that was always the hard part of loading a string of mules.

JB: Why is that?

MD: The others are crowding him. We always kept a mule that was a little bit ornery and hold him back to the last and he'd be wanting to get in. You'd turn him loose and he'd just ram in there and spread the others out. Then you'd slam the tailgate shut behind him and had them in. That was always the hardest mule to load would be the last one because the others just didn't want to stand against the sides. Of course, the one in the middle didn't care; they just as soon be crossways as not. They were well-trained. After a few...you had ornery ones once in a while, but not bad. If they got too unruly, you would talk to them by hand a little while outside and they went in the truck and you tied them on to go.

JB: Some of the names, I suppose, we don't want recorded here do we? [laughs]

MD: They had a lot of names for them alright. [laughs] I don't know.

JB: I had something I was going to ask you, but I forgot what it was. I was about to say it, when I was sitting here laughing about the names they had probably gotten called. I know what it was. Every once in a while, I hear stories that when a fire alarm would...when the sirens go of out there, that these mules would perk up their ears and start trotting toward the trucks. Is there any truth to that?

MD: [laughs] Not exactly. That's just kind of...that was publicity stuff.

JB: You never actually saw it happen?

MD: The packers like to think their mules were that smart, but really they wasn't. We did have two or three strings of mules out there...McCoy Rice [McCoy "Coy" Rice] had a string there...When the siren would sound, for some reason, he always seemed to be one of the first ones out there because if it was his turn to go out, which they did. They took turns as truck drivers and as packers.

JB: The drivers also rotated? I know the packers did.

MD: Yes. They'd open the gate from the corral and they'd go down the long lane, if you've ever looked at the corrals out there.

JB: I know what you mean.

MD: They'd go around behind and come down this chute. I've seen those mules come into that chute on a dead run. They knew they were going somewhere. I really think they did.

JB: These were Rice's mules particularly?

MD: Yeah. They had this platform along there where you could halter them without ever getting down to them. You were always above them. Just as fast as these ropes came out that chute, they were headed for the truck. We never had any trouble loading McCoy's mules.

JB: He told me once that he loaded up his pack string into the trucks and out the gate. It was on a show-me day I think. He claimed he set a record of about seven and a half minutes.

MD: That's correct.

JB: Does that sound reasonable to you?

MD: That's right. I was driving them.

JB: Were you? For heaven's sake.

MD: Yeah. We all knew what we was going to do. It was daytime. At night, once in a while, somebody would stumble around a little, not knowing exactly where they was at maybe. It was a little different working in the dark under the lights than it was...

JB: This time, that this record was set, were the mules out in a corral?

MD: They were in a corral eating hay.

JB: They had to be caught, haltered, everything?

MD: Yes.

JB: I'm glad somebody confirms that story.

MD: When you headed them for the truck, you wanted to be running because that's the way they were going to go. Generally, they would take two at a time. He generally would put these mules in there, and there would be two or three of us up on the...if you've seen the pictures, there's always somebody hanging on the side tying them down. He'd bring the mules in. He'd run right back and get two more. He'd...there was a string that did like to ride in certain places. I mean, you didn't just shuffle them around. When they got the mules so they would ride good, you always took a little note of where they were and that's where you put them again. Yup, he's true as he can be.

JB: Good because I've mentioned that to a couple of other people and they said, "Oh no, that's impossible. He must be..."

MD: We loaded a...We actually loaded a string there once one night in three minutes.

JB: Three? How do you think that happened?

MD: This was just another string that everybody was set. They knew where they was going to be to tie them in.

JB: Was that a demonstration or was it a real fire alarm?

MD: This was a fire alarm. But the truck then never moved from the chute because we didn't have the saddles loaded. This was another thing, remember on this deal of McCoy Rice's? The saddles were all in the saddle shop there in the end of the barn. There had to be two men

bringing these saddles out and putting them in and loading them before that truck could move. That's why that night we loaded this truck so quick; we still didn't have the saddles loaded, so we didn't gain anything only just...We always did that. We always would just see how quick we could load it.

JB: It must have been beautiful thing to see. Everybody doing his part of the job and coordinating all this.

MD: You bet. If you didn't...If somebody was goofing around, there'd be some more language being used not only on the mules. You'd foul up the whole load if you didn't do what you were supposed to do, I mean, getting them in the truck and getting them tied down.

JB: Right, I think I get the picture. Since we're on the subject of mules here, I'm also interested in finding out about the breeding program. How closely connected were you with the breeding of the mules or the horses, either one?

MD: I didn't have anything to do with that. That was...it started off with Boyd Thompson, who was in charge of that. Later it was Les Wolfe, at the winter range.

JB: Up at the winter range, yeah.

MD: One of the best, probably, men that they ever had on that project. The records, he kept very good records of all of the breeding. He could tell you...he got to know that stock. When you think of 400 or 500 head of mares, whether it's going to have colts, horse, or mules, he knew. If anybody doubted it, they could look at the records, but he didn't have to.

JB: I'm sorry to say, that of course, Mr. Wolfe is gone, but as bad as that is, the written records nobody can find. Do you have any idea what could have become of that?

MD: Evidently...they were in the basement at the Remount.

JB: In the basement?

MD: There's no reason for them to ever have been thrown away—the whole beginning of this thing, along with the maps of all the underground systems, of the buildings, the fences.

JB: Some of it's around, but I'm afraid the breeding books, nobody can find those breeding books.

MD: I don't know what they would have...

JB: I've asked Cap Evans about that. I've talked to the people who keep the historical records up at the regional office. You must know Beverly Ayers up there? She keeps the records.

MD: I know who she is, yes.

JB: She says that three or four years was the last time she saw this book, big green book...

MD: That's right.

JB: ...like with ledger sheets in it. It just kind of floated around the regional office and it disappeared.

MD: This is a crime that these things happen like that. In the first place, all of this should have been kept at the Remount where it belonged. They talk about closed files and this is what happens. You can never go back and get anything out of the closed files that are worth a damn because nobody knows where the closed files are. And that's where the history is.

JB: Yeah, or they get sent off to the record center where the people there don't realize they're important either.

MD: No, they don't know what they are. There's no interest in it to them.

JB: Yeah, it's really too bad, but we might...

MD: I still wondered why they took them out of the Remount. I guess, probably when the Lolo took over the office.

JB: Yeah, when it was turned into a ranger district.

MD: This could be.

JB: Yeah, I imagine a lot of it was turned over then. When was it that you moved out to the Remount Depot and stayed there on a permanent basis? When would that have been?

BD: '44.

MD: '44, spring.

BD: We were on a rubber project in Salinas for two years. He...

JB: In California?

BD: ...was working down there. We came back here the first of April, 1944. We lived in the old schoolhouse log house first. When Monty Peyton quit, they moved us up to the "Little House." We always called it the "Little House," up on the hill.

JB: I think know where you mean, maybe half a mile or so, near the trees there?

BD: We lived there until the last year we were at the Remount. MacKay was getting ready to retire and Mrs. MacKay was up in Darby overseeing the remodeling of their house up there. She was gone and they wanted us down there in the big house. They wanted someone in there, so we moved down there. We were there 11 months until he quit and transferred to the FAA [Federal Aviation Administration].

JB: You were there about a year then, actually stationed out there, is that it?

BD: No, we were there four and a half years.

JB: Excuse me, after you moved up to the house.

BD: '44 until '48.

JB: Until '48, okay. Wasn't it '48 when they quit breeding mules? Seems like it was about...

MD: That's about right. My interest in the Remount began to dwindle when the smokejumpers came in, not that I had anything against the project. Lord knows, anyway they could get the fire the fastest was the thing. But I always had a feeling, and I still do and now I can see it more and more, that they went overboard on their smokejumpers...not on the smokejumpers—on their patrolling and all this of fires with airplanes. There's one thing and it's going to break the Forest Service. I bet right now they're scratching and sweating over...They take these people out and jump them into the backcountry. Then they hire a helicopter for I don't know how many hundred dollars an hour to go bring that stuff out. You can't do this. No business can operate this way. Of course, the government don't operate like any other business anyway, I'll admit that. I worked for them for 36 years. This is something that's just throwing money away where they need a Remount again. They've needed it all the time, but they haven't used it.

JB: With mules, you mean?

MD: With mules to go in and pack that stuff out instead of spending probably \$5,000 to bring out \$500 or \$600 worth of...or \$1000 worth of parachutes and the gear that's dumped in on a fire.

JB: They did do that...

MD: This is ridiculous.

JB: ...for several years though when they first started dropping stuff from planes. They did that for a while didn't they? The mules were used mainly to haul the stuff back out again.

MD: Absolutely. Now they bury stuff in the hills I'm told, which is ridiculous.

JB: Some of it's disposable, yeah.

MD: The disposable stuff is fine, but not saws and axes and all this stuff. I'm told by people that this was done. As I say, I haven't worked for them...I haven't been on a fire for many years, but I do think someday they're going to wake up to the fact because they're going to get their money shut off. If they don't get back down on the ground and start using this pack stock that you can buy for 300 dollars a head and hire a man for what, five, three, four dollars an hour is sure cheaper than 100 dollars a minute for a helicopter.

JB: I have no idea what the cost comparison would be. You would think somebody would probably have figures on this now.

MD: They have them. You bet they have them. You and I might not ever know what they are, but it's ridiculous.

JB: Yeah, so are you saying that...

MD: I'm saying they're going to have to have a Remount again.

JB: Mainly because of the economics, the money?

MD: This is right. They don't need all these big fancy trucks like we had when we were driving all over Montana, Idaho, Washington, Yellowstone Park, and Glacier Park, and even clear to Oregon, to fires. This is where there whole DC-3 airplanes and that come in. But to haul the stuff back, there's no need I can see of them spending all this money to get this outfit back. They have good modern equipment now like these four-wheel pick-up trucks with the gooseneck trailers behind. They could haul five mules if they wanted to very easy. One man could do the whole operation. It just is to me ridiculous not to be doing it right now.

JB: I think there's more roads in. I know that's why they're using trucks. I don't know how that affects the airplanes.

MD: The cost of getting this stuff out is terrific and there isn't any reason for it to be.

JB: Do you miss the days at the Remount Depot for any other reason?

MD: I sure do. I liked the farming. I liked everything about that Remount. The one thing I didn't like about the Remount was Saturday and Sunday.

JB: Why is that?

MD: We always had too many people around us.

JB: All the visitors?

MD: If we wanted to come to town, it got to the point where we would come to town Friday night so we wouldn't be run over by people Saturday and Sunday coming out for picnics. Many of them we didn't even know. Other than that, yes, I did. We didn't get much money then either, but we never could have had better people working. They wasn't working for the money. They was working to try that they thought they were doing something to help and certainly they were.

JB: What people did you mean?

MD: I'm talking about the rangers, the alternate rangers, all the people that worked with the Forest Service. It wasn't uncommon to...we had an old painter out there for instance that would get up in the middle of the night and help them shoe stock that was come in and was going to have to go right back out again. Everybody worked and nobody complained about the salaries.

JB: No overtime, I'll bet.

MD: No overtime. We didn't know what it was. I remember one time, I think it was Friday Townsend and I had been down on the Snake River...

BD: You say Friday and now you say Leonard. It's one in the same. Friday was a nickname.

MD: We had been out for 24 hours going down and about that coming back and...now I forgot what I was going...one of us was in this bed as much as we could trying to rest; wasn't getting much sleep, but you could lay down and stretch out. When we sent our time in, the office wanted to know where we slept. They called up, wanting to know where we slept. So we told them...

[End of Tape 1, Side B]

[Tape 2, Side A]

JB: ...deducted from your checks for sleeping in the truck?

MD: That's correct.

JB: Really?

MD: We had quite a little discussion on the phone with the office about this.

JB: [laughs] I'll bet.

MD: We told him that if they wanted us to drive trucks, we wanted somebody on that payroll section to come out and go with us. Of course, they didn't have to listen to us, but we got it across to them anyway that there would be no more of that. We didn't want to wait for the next month for the money they had deducted. It was only a dollar or two, but we wanted another check for it. By golly, they sent it to us.

JB: They didn't understand the truck driver's job it sounds like or what it was like driving that stock truck.

MD: No. They didn't understand that there was no other way for you to try to get a little rest, I guess. Being real, real on the job, is a good deal for the office to charge somebody something extra if they could. It would look better for them I guess, but it sounded pretty stupid to us.

JB: This reminds me of something. Almost everybody I talk to...somehow it starts to become really apparent that the operation of the Remount Depot just wasn't like anything else in the Forest Service, absolutely.

MD: It wasn't. It was absolutely different.

JB: Different people, different jobs.

MD: You worked for everyone. This happened...in the spring when they'd start putting up saddle horses to the regents...to the forest, I should say. Everybody wanted the best horse in the corral. A lot of the best ones, the men that wanted them wasn't capable of riding that horse. They'd race the devil until they'd get them and then they'd get bucked off the first time they got on them. Then we'd catch the devil for letting him, for giving him a horse that wasn't broke, or wasn't gentle, or something like this.

JB: Whose job was it to make the decisions on which horses went where?

MD: It was Ed's or mine. If they were going out of the winter range, which a lot of them did, this was Les Wolfe's job and Ed's. It wasn't all that bad, but a lot of these...most of the trouble was with the young rangers. The old fellows knew what they could ride. The new ones didn't. I could hear these guys talking about this later, if they ever hear this. We had one come to the Remount, a real good fellow that was fresh out of the Navy.

JB: We don't have to name names. [laughs]

MD: No. He wanted to ride one of these horses so bad that he said, "How do you put the straps on them?"

I said, "What are you talking about, a bridle?"

"No, the thing you set on them." I finally figured out that he meant the saddle. So we had a little, old, pot-bellied horse there that we let the young kids that were out working on telephone lines when they still had telephone lines, and they did at that time. They'd take this little old horse and pile stuff all over him and then climb on top of it, and go. At night, they had their camp with him.

I saddled this little old pony up for him and he was really let down. He went to Ed and said I wouldn't give him a horse to ride. Ed come out and he said, "How about giving this fellow a little better horse."

I said, "Okay, I'll let him ride mine." Mine had bucked me off the day before.

So I had him saddled for him and Ed come around and he said, "You can't let him on that horse! He'll kill him."

I said, "Well, I know that, but we might as well break him in right."

Clint Running (?) was out there at that time. He was the alternate ranger, and a real good man, and good with stock, too. He took this fellow with him. Clint and I finally decided on a horse he could ride, maybe. Clint took him for a two day trip back around the lookouts and got him so stiff and sore he couldn't get off and on by himself. When he come back, he told me, "I guess maybe I should have taken that little old horse you first started me out with." I said, "I thought so, too."

JB: [laughs] Did you ever see this thing called the "Mechanical Mule"?

MD: No.

JB: I read about it in a magazine article someplace. A couple of men could push it. It was supposed to take the place on trails of a mule.

MD: [laughs] It was built out here at the shop.

JB: Was it?

MD: Yeah.

JB: Did it ever work out?

MD: I never saw it. How could it? You get to a little bush across the road, you'd be clearing more trail for that than you would if you packed in the stuff in on your back to start with.

JB: I figured it must have not lasted long since I've never heard anything about it.

MD: No, they've come up with a lot of these things. They built a scooter with...the idea was alright, but where in the devil can you ride a scooter to a fire if you're in a hurry? If you've got a week to get there, you can probably make it.

JB: I'm checking off some things here. I had made some notes about things I knew I had to ask Marion Duncan. Various people have said, "Oh, ask Marion Duncan about that. He'll know."

MD: I've been rattling on here, and I haven't said anything yet.

JB: You have! I'm enjoying this. I hope you are. Maybe you can tell me this, about when the saddle shop for a while operated out of the Remount. For a while, it operated at the winter range, is that right? It seems like it did.

MD: Not to my knowledge, not when I was there.

JB: Maybe it was later. Then at some point it was moved over to Spokane.

MD: Yes.

JB: When was it moved to Spokane?

MD: After Bill Bell left.

JB: When would that have been?

BD: That would just be a guess.

MD: It would be. Again, I think...

BD: [unintelligible]

MD: I think Don Harrington could tell you. I would say...We left in '48. '49 it was there. After I transferred to the FAA, and every year when we'd come home, I always came by the Remount to see the fellows. I think Bill was there two years after we left.

BD: They had a party for him that night.

MD: Ed. No.

BD: Bill.

MD: Bill.

JB: This was about 1950, somewhere around there?

BD: No that was before we left. Someone was [unintelligible]

MD: I would say Bill left there '48, the same year we did.

BD: I think so, too.

MD: McCoy Rice did what necessary work they needed. He's a good saddle man, too, and leatherworker. With whatever you got it, he could fix any of it. Coy might have been in that shop. I can't remember. I'd have to ask him. He would know.

JB: I've talked to Coy, but I didn't ask him about that. He didn't say anything about going over to Spokane. It doesn't matter. I was just trying to get some general idea...

MD: No, Coy didn't go to Spokane. I can't remember who. Maybe Fibber McKee (?).

JB: That would be Eldon McKee (?)?

MD: Eldon. [laughs] Yeah.

BD: I think he did.

MD: I think he may have gone to Spokane...

JB: I think that sounds about right.

MD: ...and took that saddle shop over. You mentioned it being at the winter range...

JB: I was going to ask you about the winter range, what you knew about it, and what recollections you have of the winter range.

MD: It's one of the best places in this whole country to winter stock.

JB: Why is that?

MD: It seemed to be the location. It seemed like that bad winter weather never was as severe there as it is in other places. There seems to be a warm draft that comes through there. In all the years they had that place, I can only remember one time they got in trouble with the stock being out, and they run out all winter. We had a Chinook and it suddenly changed and froze. They had a heck of a time getting some of the stock off the top of those hills down into the draws where they could travel on down to the bottom to get off of that ice.

JB: When would that have been do you think?

MD: It had been in the...I suppose about '45 or '46.

BD: We were at the Remount then.

MD: I went over there and Les, Ed, myself, and...I think Ernie White (?) might have been there. We went up and moved a couple hundred head or 300 down. It was all day getting them off of there. We didn't have trouble because they put sharp shoes on our horses. But stock that didn't have shoes on, if you got them on the hillside, and they started, they never knew where they was going to stop going.

JB: It was that bad? Really icy?

MD: It was bad for about two days. Then it warmed up and everything was...the problem was over, but we were afraid we'd get a blizzard with them up there and there'd be no way to get feed to them. So we wanted to get them down.

JB: Was it also quite cold?

MD: It was cold enough and it was icy...maybe zero, something like that, not severe.

JB: Did you ever spend any time working at the winter range?

MD: Just off and on. We used to haul all the feed in there from the Remount, the hay and the grain. I'd go over there sometimes just for a day or two to help do something. In the wintertime, I couldn't tell you...we lived at the Remount and Ed always went to the winter range in the wintertime.

JB: To stay?

MD: When the stock started coming in in the fall, he moved to the winter range. He stayed until they went out in the spring. They lived over there, yes.

JB: I didn't know that. Did you stay at the Remount then while he was over there?

MD: Yeah.

JB: When did Ed MacKay retire? Do you remember?

MD: I'd say '49.

BD: '52.

MD: '52. That's right.

BD: We left and he was going to and then he stayed another year.

MD: He stayed another year after I left.

BD: No, he stayed longer. We left...

MD: He stayed two years.

BD: ...'49 to '51. Two more years.

JB: Mrs. Duncan, why don't you bring your chair over and sit and chat with us a bit, too, because...

MD: Why don't you get over here?

JB: No, that's all right. Just come on over and join us because I'd be interested in what you remember, too.

BD: I don't have much to add. I just have times and dates once in a while.

JB: That's okay. You're a woman, and you probably saw some things differently than the men did.

BD: I had nothing to do with the work down there.

JB: But you lived down there.

BD: All I did was watch to him for come home and eat once in a while.

JB: But you lived out there for a while.

BD: Yeah, we lived in...we lived out there for four and a half years, we were, before he transferred to that other branch of government.

JB: How did you spend most of your time?

BD: I had a family. We had three children in school.

JB: Where'd they go to school?

BD: They were at school in Alberton. They were all in high school. The neighbors, we would get together and play bridge once in a while and go to town.

JB: By town, do you mean Missoula?

BD: Missoula. There wasn't much in Alberton. We just went to Alberton for school activities. That's...I was a housewife and mother. That's the way I spent my time. There was plenty to do.

JB: What was it like living out there?

BD: It was a nice place to live. We had a nice house, very comfy. We had good neighbors.

JB: Who were you mostly friends with while you were up there?

BD: There was Mrs. MacKay, and then Peg Longpre lived across in the Longpre Ranch which is now Moore's. Then after Hankinson (?) left as ranger in the Lolo District, Bob Smart and his family moved in there. Fran was another of my friends, his wife. We used to play bridge. Peg later went to work for the Forest Service. After he retired and they went to Missoula, she went to work for the Forest Service, and she retired a couple of years ago. It was just routine stuff as far as I was concerned.

JB: I hear that the...people have talked about their friendships out there, being friends with people in the Ninemile Valley and so on. It sounds like a big neighborhood.

BD: Well, it was. They had a...

MD: Yeah, it really was.

BD: I knew a lot of people, but mostly I visited with a close neighbor. I had a lot of friends in town. We lived in Missoula for...a good many years. I had a lot of friends in town, so I used to come to town a lot to bridge parties and luncheons and things like that.

JB: I suppose that the trip wouldn't have been quite as fast as it is now. The road wasn't as good was it?

BD: It took a half an hour.

JB: That's not bad.

BD: [laughs] There were no speed limits those days. Not as many cars on the road either. You could make pretty good time.

JB: Is there anything special you remember about your time at the Remount Depot? Anything that you think people might want to know?

BD: I can't think of anything really.

JB: Were you out there during the filming of the movie.

BD: No.

MD: Yes.

BD: Were we?

MD: You mean...

JB: *Red Skies of Montana*...

MD: Yeah, we lived there.

JB: ...when all those people came in?

BD: I don't remember that. I guess it was far removed from my part I was playing out there.

JB: That's interesting. I should think most people would remember if a movie was being filmed.

BD: What year was that?

JB: I think it was 1950.

BD: We weren't there in 1950.

MD: We wasn't there in '50.

BD: We weren't there when they filmed that story.

MD: If I could see the picture, I could show you Huntley, myself, old Ben Scudder (?), and somebody else walking.

JB: In the movie?

MD: Yes.

JB: Is that right?

MD: From about here up...from here down.

JB: The feet. [laughs]

MD: Yeah, they wanted a feet shot.

JB: How is it they wanted your feet?

BD: We left there [unintelligible]

MD: Showing a bunch of firefighters going to a fire. Then, they show how the smokejumpers did it.

JB: How is it you happened to be around, but your wife wasn't?

BD: If that was filmed in '50, we left there...

MD: That's a good thought because...

JB: Actually in '51, too.

MD: I've got pictures of the siren that we monitored by the horse chute. Especially for the loading the stock. Then that wasn't good. They didn't want the stock in there, so they had to cut that part of it out because it had to be just smokejumpers.

JB: There were no mules in the movie? No horses and mules?

MD: I can't remember that they didn't take any there. We did at the time. Then, of course, we heard that this was all done and we loaded this stock bar and all this. They went...hell, they was around there for three days! I don't...The only thing I ever saw, as I say, in the picture was we were walking from out toward the corral and loading chute down toward the bunkhouse, which we were supposed to be going to get our packs to go to the fire. We got down...old Bill Bell was limping along with us, too. We got down there almost to the bunkhouse and anyway they turned around and sent us back. They told us we didn't walk right. This went on until old Bill and old Huntley...if you knew either one of them, you could imagine the language that was starting to...

JB: Who was Huntley?

MD: ...be coming forth then. He was an old packer.

JB: What was his name?

BD: George.

MD: George Huntley (?).

JB: George Huntley? Okay.

MD: Any of the boys at the Remount, even the kids, like Don Harrington and those fellows, they would always remember George. He was a character. This was the whole thing. Anyway, when we saw the picture, here's our feet going down. I could pick them out because I knew what kind of boots I was wearing and so did Bill. The three days of the pictures they took there, that was all they used.

JB: They cut out the parts about mules then because they didn't want that?

MD: Yeah. No.

JB: The movie was going to be about the new way of doing things.

MD: That's right.

BD: That had to be later than '48 because that's when we left there. We weren't back around there any time after that.

MD: No, I was working there. Maybe it was going to be a different name or something. I don't know, but I think it was supposed to be the...

JB: The movie I'm talking about, they came in '50, started filming, and one of the actors was injured. So they came back the next summer in '51 and finished making the movie.

MD: Yes, that's right.

JB: Were there other movies made or just Forest Service films made out there?

MD: Not to my knowledge. I think when these pictures I'm talking about were taken...it was the beginning of this same picture you're talking about.

JB: Could be. I don't know.

MD: It dragged out for some reason. They stopped it and started again and then they moved. Much of the location I think later was taken up in Lolo somewhere.

JB: I don't know.

MD: That's where what's his name fell off the motorcycle.

JB: Right.

MD: He skinned his shin. I don't know whatever happened to him.

JB: Were you around when they started...Wasn't there a sale of some of the mules? Along about '48? Am I correct about that? Did they sell off some of those mules?

MD: No, they sold purebred mares and colts. I can't remember any mules being sold. They went out of the breeding business.

JB: For the horses or for the mules?

MD: Actually for both. We had all we needed. People around the country could bring mares there and have them bred at no cost. This was the reason for starting this thing was to get horses and mules back in the country.

JB: Yeah, I guess they hadn't been raised for some time.

MD: This is right. You couldn't buy hardly a good saddle horse. Schall's over in Arlee area, they had good stock. There was a few around.

JB: Is that the same Schall that's up there now that raises thoroughbred horses?

MD: Yes, I had one of their...I rode one of their horses for quite a while. In fact, I had him I guess when I left here. One of the best horses I ever rode. They began to get horses and mules all over. After all, we wasn't supposed to be in the stock business. These American Saddlers was the poorest excuse for a mountain horse, as they were invented...it wasn't for that. A lot of good horses came from there, and mares that were trained, and have been in shows and have done awfully well.

JB: Even the half-bred saddlers, didn't they work out okay?

MD: Yes, very good. That was the sale that I remember getting rid of all the mares that were raising these hot blood colts. A hot blood horse was no good on a trail. They were too fast and they were too nervous. You couldn't get off of them [unintelligible].

JB: You mean they sold just the purebred ones?

MD: That's as I remember; that was all that went. I can't think that...I can't remember that they even sold any of the studs or jacks. I don't know where they went to. I can't remember.

JB: Who bought these horses? Do you have any idea?

MD: Yes, Charlie Smith here in Missoula bought one of the little mares. Simmons, I believe, who was an undertaker here, bought two or three.

BD: Anybody could bid on them.

MD: I was trying to think of some of the people that did...what was his name, this friend of Smith's, he bought three or four there that day. Bucko.

BD: Staninger.

MD: Staninger.

JB: These were all mares. Is that right?

MD: No, I think possibly that a couple of them were probably horses, or geldings I mean.

JB: Yeah, I don't know when it was, if it was the same year or later, I have the name of a man up in Kalispell who apparently bought a couple of the stallions. His name is Neas. N-E-A-S.

MD: Yes, I know him. He was probably one of the best stockman in probably up in that whole area. This sale could have taken place well after I lived here.

JB: There was more than one sale.

MD: It suddenly dawns me that, sure, because they had to get rid of...They had all these old brood mares that they had to do something with that they raised these colts with for four or five years. Like you say, the stallions and the jacks, they didn't need them anymore.

JB: Yeah, I'm having trouble getting straight in my head when these various sales were. Apparently, there were several of them and it's hard to keep track of when they were.

MD: This is right.

JB: There aren't any records now as I was saying.

MD: Can you get a hold of Neas?

JB: I've written to him. I haven't heard from him. Does he still live up in Kalispell? I have an address up there, but I haven't heard back.

MD: I think so, or some of the family. He must be an old man like myself. He would know.

JB: Is there anything else about the Remount Depot that you think people ought to know? Anything that's important. Just how you feel about it or anything else you saw?

MD: Yes, there is. I'll never get over them cutting those great big trees in the yard at the Remount. We have a Forest Service that's supposed to preserve timber and take care of them. The first damn thing they did after we left there was cut down all the big shade trees around the big house down there—the superintendent's house.

JB: Were these native? Had they already been there or had they been planted?

MD: They were planted there by the Scheffers or the people before Scheffers. I don't know. The Scheffers owned the ranch.

JB: What kind of trees were they?

MD: They were cottonwoods. They were getting big. They were told, or they decided, that they were rotten and that they should be cut. Instead of topping them, they cut them, and every one I saw was as solid as they could be. That was the biggest shock I ever had when I went back to the Remount that fall or the first time since I left there, to see these trees gone.

JB: When did they get cut?

MD: I would say it was '49.

BD: Ed was still there in '49.

MD: Well, it was after Ed left, '51 or '52 probably. Another thing I don't like: the front porch looks like an Indian outfit. They pile all their wood on the front porch for the fire place. What kind of an outfit are they running out there anyway? I can't understand this.

JB: You're talking about the ranger's house?

MD: I'm talking about the...I don't know who lives there. I'm talking about the house that used to be the supervisor's house for the Forest Servic...for the Remount.

JB: The ranger lives there now.

MD: That's ridiculous. He's got a garage he could put his wood in.

JB: Yeah, I don't know what he's got in his garage.

MD: I don't either.

JB: When was the last time you were out there, Mr. Duncan?

MD: I drive by there...four or five times a year.

JB: Do you?

MD: But I seldom go in anymore because I don't know anyone.

JB: There's been a lot of changes. They've converted those buildings, changed it around. The one, that smallish building in there next to the barn, I guess it started out to be a garage...

MD: It was.

JB: ...for working on those trucks. Then it got converted to a classroom. Now it's being remodeled on more time. Now it's going to be some more offices for the ranger district.

MD: And they got offices in the bunkhouse? What do they got in the cookhouse? Offices?

JB: Offices. I went over there one afternoon. I was over in the main office, in the old bunkhouse, talking to the ranger and I went over to the other building because that's where they keep the

coffee machine, so that's where I got my coffee. There were a lot of people working on maps, doing stuff like that, engineer types.

MD: These things are changed so much. When I was out there, or before that, I can think of the Remount people, Seeley Lake, and all the other stations. Six men was a big crew. They did the work. I can say that I feel really sorry for any forest ranger now because you don't have anything to say. He does what they tell him from the office from Washington to do. They have so much paperwork that the poor rascals can't even get up and get a look at their own areas. I feel sorry for them. It shouldn't be. They should be running this. That's what they're out there for and they're capable of doing it, but they do something...get rid of many of them in Washington.

JB: [laughs] Probably a lot of people would like to do that.

MD: This is true. It would be awfully hard to know that there's something that should be done here and Washington says, "No, this is not the way we're going to do it. We're going to do something else." This must hurt those fellows because they're capable of doing it. They're educated and they're...they've had the experience, like the boy that's there right now, I've never met him, from Deer Lodge came over there, the ranger.

JB: The ranger here now is...You mean out at the Ninemile?

MD: Yes.

JB: That's Charlie Fudge, who's out there now.

MD: That's right. I've never met him, but he's had a good record wherever he's been. I'll see him sometime, when I'm out there. I feel sorry for those people.

JB: One thing he's doing that you'd feel good about is he...

[End of Tape 2, Side A]

[Tape 2, Side B]

MD: We'd help the fellows get saddled. They set up this campsite and were going to have something to eat. We thought we'll kind of wake up that way and rest a little. I was helping Lee and we got ready to put a load on each side of this colt. I started up on from one side and Lee from the other and, I don't know, he stumbled or something. Anyway, the colt jumped away from me and kicked Lee in the belly. It really folded him up. I dragged him out of the way from the stock and got him set up against a stump. I didn't think he was hurt very much, just the air knocked out of him, I thought, but he didn't come around as good as he should.

Bob Bayer, the rascal, he was the assistant supervisor then of the Kootenai or of [unintelligible]. They had him down there on that job, on that fire. The men, they were gone; they were headed out. So I had to get this stuff into them. Bob said, "Duncan, why don't you take that string and go in. We've got a man in there and somehow we'll get hold of him and he can take the string over when you come back out." I said, "Okay." I started and we had another fellow with us, George Case. He always liked to pack the mules that nobody else wanted. George left ahead of me.

JB: With another string?

MD: With another string. In fact, there was two strings ahead of me. I was the last one. George was ahead of me, up around the creek and up over a little bluff and down through some bushes. I heard a noise that sounded like a couple of bears fighting down there in the brush. I come around this point and here's George's outfit all down in the creek. They'd run into a swarm of hornets up there.

JB: Good heavens.

MD: The pack strings ahead of them had stirred them up. When George come along, they nailed him and he was down in the creek picking up his stuff, dragging it around, trying to get his mules on their feet.

JB: Were the mules in the creek?

MD: Yeah, some of them upside down in the creek with their packs on them. He was running around cutting rope, so they could get their heads up so they wouldn't drown. I tied my old horse up and went down there, thinking every minute that mine would probably be down on of us pretty soon, but we got them up, got them loaded again. He led them up the creek a little ways and got back up on the trail.

I kind of followed him a foot because I wanted him to get out of my way. He got up there and the sweat was running off of him and he said, "Duncan, if there was anybody here to quit to, I'd quit!" [laughs] I'll never forget that. We went into the fire and we come back out. That was the only trip I've ever made really packing in there.

JB: What happened to your friend that got kicked that you'd left down there?

MD: We finally put him in a pickup and took him to Kalispell...Look at that kid with the....Couldn't figure out what he was doing.

JB: He's got a hawk.

BD: Yeah, I saw him with it yesterday.

MD: When I came through, they put him in the truck and I brought him back to the Remount with me. This fellow that I was supposed to meet up there took the pack string. He got kicked harder than I thought he did. I thought he just got pushed down, but the old mule really whacked him a good one.

JB: Did he have to go to the hospital?

MD: No.

JB: Sounds like, most of the time, these people never did end up at the hospital.

MD: You had to be hurt before you went to the hospital.

BD: You didn't have insurance those days...

JB: I suppose.

BD: ...so you didn't go to the hospital then.

MD: We didn't encourage it. It was too much work to make out all these government forms to send them. [laughs]

JB: Did you ever get hurt working with mules or were you around them that much?

MD: No, I can't remember that I did. You'd get hurt once in a while [unintelligible]. You'd grunt and groan a while and then go back to work.

JB: You watched lots of guys who were with them all the time, people like Bill Bell.

MD: Yeah.

JB: How did Bell work with these mules? I hear a lot about Bill Bell, but what made him special?

MD: I think his age and the years of experience he had in the region. He was a ranger clear back over in the Moose River country for years before he came there. He and Ed MacKay were good friends. I think that's what brought him to the Remount. Actually, Bill Bell was too old to be doing this heavy packing.

JB: By the time you were out there that's probably true.

MD: That's what I mean. He was always the man that we could depend on. During the bad seasons, or busy seasons, they'd hold Bill back as long as they could. He never hesitated to go

when he was asked to go. In fact, sometimes his nose would be bent a little because he felt he was still one of the boys.

JB: How old was he then? This time you're talking about now, how old would he have been?

MD: He was a lot older than I was, so I suppose he must have been in his...

BD: Sixties.

MD: ...Sixties, late sixties maybe. It wasn't that he wasn't capable of doing the work, but he was just...they felt that lifting these heavy packs and laying out on the ground at night wasn't good for him. After all, they needed him for a saddle man when he...he was always busy. When these strings would come in with a bunch a gear tore up, Old Bill would work to get it going again. He was well worth more than he ever got just to keep this pack gear together.

JB: He was really good with the leather?

MD: He was wonderful, one of the nicest leather workers I ever saw.

JB: How had he learned that work I wonder?

MD: Just good hands, good head.

JB: Did you watch him working with mules and horses?

MD: He didn't break stock much. This Coy Rice was probably one of the better hands at breaking stock.

JB: I've been told about a Charlie Johnson who also broke stock out there. Did you know him?

MD: Very well. Charlie worked there for me.

JB: How did Charlie go about breaking an animal?

MD: I thought he was a little rough. Especially, these half-hot bloods or colts...my thinking is, the way I was taught, you didn't try to knock it out of them before you started. You tried to get acquainted with them. But he was more the cowboy type. He liked to get a saddle on, turn them loose, and let them go. We had another good man out there when the Remount first started, I can't think of his name now, was very much the same way. Walt—

BD: Peery.

MD: —Peery was the opposite. He never wanted a horse to buck with him. He taught them to...tried to train them to keep them from bucking. Rice did the same thing, and Rice was a good rider. He rode rodeos when he was a young guy, around the country and others. But Johnson was a good man and his pack string...he didn't care if half his mules were colts, if they...He was young and full of steam then. He'd get over that in a year or two.

JB: Do you have any idea of what became of him? Where he'd be now?

MD: He's in Idaho someplace, the last I heard. I don't know.

JB: Walt Peery is still in Missoula.

MD: Have you talked to Walt?

JB: No, I haven't. He's on my list of people I ought to get to.

MD: I wish you would. He's a wonderful guy, and as I say, I admired him very much, watching him break horses out there during the early days. He has a ranch and he's been busy and all this. I always recall one time, we was building this garage. We were on top, four of us, putting the roof on. Walt was going to ride a colt that he had bought from someplace—he was mean. There wasn't any doubt about it. He fooled with him for a day or two. This day he put the saddle on him in the morning, fooled around with him, and finally just turned him loose. The horse bucked around and around in the corral. Walt just went to do something else, just let him get used to the saddle.

That afternoon he was going to ride him. At the noon table, of course, we got to betting how long Walt would ride before he got bucked off. The ranger came out, or the superintendent, and he thought he'd have a little fun. Walt slipped up onto this horse and was easing him out toward the back gate. Leonard Townsend was out there. After he'd made a circle or two, he was going to open the gate and let Walt go out.

He was getting along so well with the horse that the superintendent thought he should have to work a little harder than that. So he picked up a rock and threw it. He was going to hit the horse, and it hit Walt right in the back of the head. It almost knocked his hat off and almost knocked him off the horse, too. When he did, he went over. Of course, he dug the horse and just tore up the ground. He hollered at Leonard to open the gate. When he come around the second time, he was really digging him to get him to run him. He was really bucking. He run him down in the meadow there and around and around. I'll never forget that guy that threw the rock.

JB: Who was that?

MD: He was the superintendent, Jake Williams. When he saw that blood start to run down the back of Walt's head, he shook his head. [laughs] Never said a word to us; turned around and walked back to the house. When Walt came back and run the horse back into the corral again, he told Leonard, "Shut the gate." He shut it and he run him up into the corner. He got off of him and come out through the horse draw, and threw his hat down on the ground, [laughs] and wiped some of the blood off. He never did ask who threw that rock at him.

JB: He didn't?

MD: I don't think he ever saw Butler at all. I don't think he ever saw him...Williams I mean. That evening, Williams came out. He was afraid to climb up on the building with us, so he always talked from the bottom. I said, "You damn near knocked Walt off of that horse." He said, "I

didn't do that!" [laughs] He was afraid that Walt would find out that he did it. Boy, that old horse sure come apart though. I'll bet you that Walt would remember that, too.

JB: Could be. I just thought of one thing that maybe you do know something about since you spent so much time in the warehouse. I had forgotten to ask you about that. When a fire call went out, these mules and the equipment of course all went out from the Remount. But the equipment and food and everything went from the warehouse.

MD: Right.

JB: I've been trying to get straight in my mind, at least in the early days, was this stuff already bundled up the right weight and everything from the warehouse? How much did the packer have to do when that stuff arrived?

MD: They put their...You know what a mantie is?

JB: Yeah, that's the big tarp.

MD: Mantie this stuff up and put it on. Yes, the gear had all...all this had been worked out. Actually, it was worked out after the Remount started. Out there at...Every year, '33, '34, and '35, they had field days and brought packers in from everywhere to figure out how these packs should be put together so they'd be the easiest to handle and stay together until they'd mantie them and were easiest to lift and so forth. We would get the call at the warehouse the same time they'd get it out there.

JB: Okay, that's what I was wondering about.

MD: Right close together. Then it was a race to see if we could get loaded here and get the stuff where the pack stock was going to be so it would be there before they got there. Generally, we could beat them because we used two ton trucks or ton and a half stake body trucks. You could haul a 50 man outfit pretty easy on them on one truck. If there were firefighters going out, which there was, we had trucks with seats in them and we could haul 100 men out.

They'd get to the end of the road, and if the cook was any good, and most of them were, they'd set up a camp right there to feed these fellows that were going to fight fires because many of them were picked up off the street and they were hungry. They'd feed them before they started hiking them into the fire, unless we were lucky enough to be right on the edge of the fire, and many times we were not. That part worked real good. These were all friends, all these people were, but they always would harass them a little, whoever was late getting there, whether it was the equipment or the mules. Where had they been and all this.

JB: Do you mean that at the warehouse was the stuff bundled up according to weight right there?

MD: Yes, not only for that, but for Johnsons had the first contract for hauling for fire equipment that they'd throw out of airplanes onto the troops.

JB: Yeah, right, later.

MD: This was stuff all had weights marked right on her. Of course that you had to be real careful about that you didn't overload the plane. The mules, we never worried about them. If you could get it on, they'd carry it.

JB: But was the stuff all bundled up in a mantie at the warehouse?

MD: No.

JB: Not in a mantie?

MD: Not in a mantie. That was up to the boys out there.

JB: How was it loaded out at the truck then? I'm trying to get in my mind, how did he know where his weight load was?

MD: You had a 50 man outfit; you had a box that had 24 axes in it or two boxes. They had 12 axes in it. So that was two boxes of axes. Another bundle of shovels—that was the brute (?). They had the shovels; they had the fire irons that they used for the campfires, and something else. I can't remember what else was in there. That was the most awkward bundle that ever was made. This stuff was all bound together with wire from wiring machines. These big bundles were in mail sacks, surplus mail bags about that high. This is what held it together. That was slipped over the whole thing and then wires were put around with wiring machines that made them a fairly solid bundle to handle.

It took so many of them, so many bundles of axes, beds. There were six beds to a pack. That would be 12 beds. That would be a load for a mule. Not that it was heavy, but that was all the bulk they could carry. It didn't take in a stove and something else. It was all packed together. I can't remember what. There was a regular wash boiler that had a 25 man outfit and that had all the cooking utensils.

There was another one. There was three boxes: one of them was lunch, one of them was breakfast, one of them was dinner that night. These were all marked that way. So as you started to load this outfit, you just started backing the truck down. Two men would start throwing it on one man on top would load. It didn't take long to load a 50 or 100 man outfit out of there.

JB: After it got there, then they would get it onto their mules and adjust it. You were mentioning beds a while ago. Were they sleeping bags?

MD: Yeah.

JB: What were they made of then?

MD: Kapok. You can go back farther than that when the first job I had in the Forest Service, you rolled your own beds. A bed was a tarp with two wool blankets in it. I did that for several days and nights down in the Front Street warehouse when I was there. I didn't know that there was

that many people in the country that were on fires. The next year, they finally got the first kapok sleeping bags.

JB: When was that?

MD: It would have been in '30 or '31. '30, I think. That was a big improvement. They had backpack straps on them so the firefighter could carry his own bed. He carried a bed, and he carried a shovel and a Pulaski tool, if you know what that is.

JB: Yeah.

MD: Of course there were sawing crews that carried their saws, and wedges, and such as that.

JB: By the time you were talking about loading up stuff from the warehouse, those beds were probably those kapok bags. Is that right?

MD: The first year they were, as I say, a tarp and...Yes, what we're talking about was...

JB: In through the '30s.

MD: Yeah, that's right.

JB: It sounds like we covered a lot today.

MD: When they came back from fire, they...We had a contract with the laundries and could take the sleeping bags right down there and have them cleaned. This worked out real good, too.

JB: You sort of saw it from both ends then, didn't you? You were down at the warehouse...

MD: Yes, I liked it.

JB: ...you were out here.

MD: I was here, I was there, and in the forest part of the time. It couldn't have been better. The monotony would wear off...By spring, I was getting anxious to get out of that garage. This was a big job in the spring, too, hauling all this stock out to the various forests where they went. Townsend and I that did that take. It'd run over a period of a month.

JB: What was the farthest you drove stock?

MD: I would say Grangeville [ID]. You had to go through Spokane to have roads that would hold up those trucks. I would think Grangeville, down on the Musselshell, up the Clearwater to Orofino and in there.

JB: Did you ever use the big trucks for that job?

MD: That's what we used.

JB: The Kenworths?

MD: Definitely. That's what I was using when I said I turned the truck over. We only had one trailer. The trucks would haul 12 heads of stock, and so would the trailers, but the pack string was 10 heads. We only carried a full load when we was hauling them out in the spring or hauling them in in the fall. Then when we...

JB: I didn't realize that. So at that time you put in 12?

MD: With the truck and trailer, you could haul 24 head.

JB: Yeah. You did a lot of jobs for the Forest Service.

MD: Yeah, I enjoyed the whole thing, but I just felt like it was time for me to move. What started all this, really, when they first put the beacons through this country, the beacon lights, the Forest Service packed all these beacons in for the Civil Aeronautics.

JB: Did they? On mules?

MD: From mules from the Remount.

JB: When was that?

MD: That would have been '32.

JB: I didn't know about that.

MD: It's when that first truck, the big one. We used that to take the stock down to St. Regis or to the [unintelligible]. They packed them from Wallace. There's one above Wallace; from there to the one over on top of the hill in Helena.

JB: That's interesting the mules get used to haul the lights in for the airplanes and the airplanes eventually replace the mules.

MD: [laughs] Yeah, that's right. That's very true.

JB: Thanks a lot, Mr. Duncan.

MD: Thank you.

[End of Interview]