

This is an interview with Aubrey L. Garber by Roxanne Farwell for the Smokejumpers Oral History Project in Missoula, Montana, on July 21, 1984. OH# 133-39

AG Might be a little bit hoarse because I walked 4 miles just a few minutes ago. [laughs]

RF This is Roxanne Farwell with the Smokejumpers Oral History Project. I'm interviewing Aubrey Garber and we are at Miller Hall in the University of Montana. It's July 21, 1984, and it's about 11:00 AM. OK, Mr. Garber, could you tell me when you were born?

AG I was born February 26, 1917.

RF And where were you born?

AG Jonesville, Virginia.

RF When did you come to this area, Missoula?

AG I was out here in 1944, first.

RF For the smokejumper project?

AG Right.

RF OK. Can you outline your background before you became a smokejumper?

AG Well, I've been a... I was a bachelor and I've been a rambler and a rover, I've been a lot of places, worked at a lot of things. But I had worked at... well I had studied engineering at the University of Tennessee and... had worked at the Aluminum Company of America in Alcoa, Tennessee and... had worked at Tennessee Eastman's Corporation in Kingsfort, Tennessee, and for Crosley Corporation in Richmond, Indiana. Those were the jobs I'd had immediately before coming here. I'd been... I grew up on a farm in east Tennessee.

RF Did you have any military experience?

AG No.

RF How'd you find out about the smokejumping program?

AG I was in the program in Virginia and was assigned to the George Washington and the Jefferson National Forest[s] in Virginia, and they needed some volunteers for this in '43 so I volunteered to come out.

RF You said you were in a program in Virginia, what program?

AG Uh, CPA [CPS?] program in Virginia.

RF OK, yeah. So you volunteered for the smokejumping program? What attracted you to that?

AG Well, I wanted to do the most dangerous thing I could think to do. [laughs]

RF Why?

AG Well, because a lot of people said, "He's yellow, he didn't, he didn't go into the military, he just wanted to hide." So, I said that it wasn't that... I want to go do the most dangerous thing I can get in to.

RF Yeah. I understand from talking to other people that were in kind of the same situation as you that... the attitude was that smokejumping was a very useful thing to do for a community and for the nation, too.

AG Right. We didn't know at the time that... the actual value of the program because it had been designed, as I understand it, just to control forest fires, and we didn't know about the military connotation there. Now we know, after the war was over, we learned that we saved... we 96 men, saved the morale of the whole nation by extinguishing all those fires set by the Japanese bombs.

We also kept it such a secret that they [the Japanese] thought it was a failure, and discontinued their program before the war was over. So, the public still doesn't know a lot about it... there are very few people who know about it. They know that there were jumpers putting out fires set by lightning, and so forth, but not the incendiary's sent over on the trade winds.

RF Uh huh. So....

AG You didn't know the entire history of that, did you?

RF No, I'd heard that the... I heard that the 555th battalion of the Airborne was being trained to... for that threat, the Japanese firebomb threat, but I didn't know....

AG Well, it was over with before any military men jumped here, I think. We had a few military men assigned after I left, I know, but... they had not had the type of training we had, and they were not accustomed to the type of chutes we had. So, it was a little difficult for them to... they helped us on the bigger fires, such as the Tillamook National fire in '44, I believe. Or '45. Burned 200,000 acres in Washington. We... all we could do was contain it. We couldn't put it out at all without enough men. There were probably not enough men left on the West coast to do it at that time.

RF Yeah. How many people jumped that fire? Everybody that was...?

AG Oh, not all of us jumped on it. There were certain areas

that had to be jumped, but we could only go in and try to contain it... and save the villages and the towns, and so forth... wait for the fall rains. So, we didn't jump nearly so many men. We just went in and did what we could with the help of equipment, and so forth.

RF I hadn't realized the other aspect of the smokejumping during the war.

AG Well, one reason I was in that program, I had a little sad experience when I came. I got through the training program in '44 and I was such an avid volleyball fan, that I broke my hand just before... just after the training season and couldn't jump. So, they sent me to Boles Point. One of the highest points in the fire tower out here in the Rockies. And I spent that... the rest of that summer in the fire tower and, sort of isolated, didn't see a human being for about... oh, five months... or whatever the season was there. I don't remember.

But... I did see some big bears while I was there. In fact, one of the biggest bears I ever saw, coming down the trail while I was carrying my water jug up the trail one day... but, I had a dog with me... I took 'Jeep' along. He was a... sort of a, stray dog that took up at the Ranger Station out at Nine Mile. He was a fairly young pup then... I took him back to Tennessee with me later, but.... He went to the tower on Boles Point, and stayed with me in the tower. I had trouble getting him up there, I had to put a sugar sack over his head to get him up the steps... the first time, but after that, he would run up and down just like it was home.

And he barked at the huge grizzly, and he [the grizzly] trotted off down through the woods. It's the only thing that saved me from fainting, I guess, because I was trying to think whether you climb a thick tree, or a small tree. I couldn't remember which they told me, one or the other. [laughs]

But, it was pretty rugged back in those mountains there. And... I'm sure you've heard before how expert the Johnson Brothers Flying Service was at dropping cargo, and so forth. They brought my mail twice while I was up there. The first time, they banked around and threw the packet in my window as they came by. The second time, I don't know whether it was the same pilot or not, but he missed the tower and hit a tree. And it took me about two weeks to gather my mail up on the mountainside, but they were pretty good.

I recall one time, I believe it might have been on the Tillamook fire, that they came over and dropped cargo. Of course, we didn't have radios then. We had to make signs with streamers... tell them what we needed. Somebody wanted them to drop some supplies, including eggs, and they put the streamer on a flat rock. He dropped it on the target! We didn't have an egg left [laughs] out of a case of eggs! But, they were good at cargo. The old Trimotor planes could be slowed down, I think, [to] about 60 mph. Get down in the canyons, right down close and pull out. As... as well as the Travelaires we use on the smaller fires.

RF So you spent the first season back in the woods.

AG In the tower. And then, of course, came back into town. In the winter I worked in the Region 1 office, over in Missoula. We stayed at the Sigma Chi house here in Missoula, at that time and had to walk across that bridge which I just walked across this morning. And the wind came out of Hellgate Canyon and froze the tear ducts over your eyes, so that it was... it was painful when you got inside. The only... the only river in the world that I've ever seen that freezes from the bottom up in the wintertime. Starts freezing in the bottom, then gets completely froze.

RF Hellgate wind is pretty bad.

AG Yeah. Well... since I did have this age where it gave you a lot of time to work at other things... around the office, and so forth. During one of those two years we published the Smokejumper Album. which... I have a copy of with me... one of the originals... which was a fine piece of photographic work because we used the training films from the Forest Service Department, and other things.

I designed the emblem... the Smokejumpers emblem... because... I had it etched in leather on my own personal album and everybody liked it. So we copied it and made that the emblem for our T-shirts... our stationary... I still get some stationary from them with that emblem on it. And of course, we had gold wings designed too... from that same design. I bet we had 96 men then. We had about hundred pairs of the wings made. I don't know if they continued making those in later years or not.

And then, somehow or other, in '45.... I still didn't get to go jump... or to go through the spring training again in '45, so they sent me into Oregon. I can't recall exactly how it was, but I went with the ONC, which is the Oregon and California Reclamation Bureau... on a survey party. We surveyed an antelope refuge, not too far from Bend, Oregon, up on a plateau... about a 5,000 foot elevation and it's all desert and... sand is what it was. We were there when... when VE day came. And the war was over... somebody had a radio and we knew it was over, so we went back to... we got in our truck and we had a crew chief with us, a real old-time fellow who was a great outdoorsman. He could outwalk everybody on that survey party out in that 110 degree heat all day. But anyway, we packed up and went to Crater Lake and camped out for a couple a nights... I think it was the weekend coming up. I had my other bear story happen there! [laughs]

While we camped that first night by the lake, I was sleeping in the sleeping bag, I felt something brush agin my face. And smelled a peculiar odor also. Finally got awake, and realized there was some animal. I was pretty much scared because I didn't know what it was, or... it was real dark! I yelled loud, and he jumped off and started down the hill. I found out the next morning it was, sort of a pet, a big grizzly, around the camp there. He was standing with his feet on a wash bench eating peanuts out of a bag someone had left... and right over my head! So, we used that old bear to pull tricks on some of the other

boys. We'd hide wieners in the tree near there... where they were sleeping, and so forth.

But those were just some of the fun things that happened along with our activities here. I don't know exactly where I came to... when we came back in off that survey party at the end of the summer, I came into... some town. I guess I came into Eugene, Oregon, and stayed in Eugene.... Or Salem! Came into Salem, but I spent a lot of time over in Eugene. Because, uh... Norman Van Brocklin was the quarterback over there for the football team, and I got acquainted with him. And... with his aid we were able to pick up girls about anytime. [laughs]

But, I stayed there until the last day of '45 when I was mustered out, and went back East. And I stayed East! Forty years now, and then I finally came back and got to see what the Big Sky looked like.

RF Still looks pretty good out here.

AG It does. I haven't yet met very many of the fellows from my class there, but I noticed Joe Osborn [Joseph C. Osborn] is here, and Phil Stanley [Phillip B. Stanley] and....

RF Did you see Phil?

AG I saw Phil, yeah.

RF Oh good, he said he might show.

AG I have a great picture of him in that annual that we published back in '44 or '45.

RF Well, what do you remember from your training, what was it like?

AG Well, there's one thing that I'll never forget, and that's that jump from the tower... the practice tower. Man! That almost break your spine when you hit that dead end and bounce about 15 feet high.

RF How high was the tower that you jumped out of?

AG The tower was twenty feet... you jumped to within about two feet of the ground, and then you came to the end of the rope, and you bounce back up in the air. It taught you to take the shock onto your feet with the straps that came under your feet, and so forth.

I also remember... Lew Berg, in one of our training jumps... he weighed about 240 lbs., I think... he was one of... I guess, the largest man in our unit. But he landed astride a new barb wire fence, barbed wire fence that went around the deal. He bounced about 10 feet in the air when he hit that wire fence... with that tape all the way around under his jumpsuit... he wasn't injured, but he sure put on a good show. I wish they'd had a film of that. [laughs] I don't know if he was the same Lew Berg, but a few years later I saw in the news... a listing that Lew Berg was

the Chief of Police in Chicago. He was about tough enough to be!

And the one... I don't remember the guy's name, [Ed Carlson], that... that jumped without hooking his static line... with our training jump. You may have had stories about him... but I can't recall who it was. Well, anyway... he didn't hook his static line... or somebody didn't hook it, and he fell till we couldn't see him. We were watching the jumps, you know... near the forest, and he went out of sight, so we started in looking for him and met him walking out with his chute under his arm. He'd gotten his emergency chute pulled just in time and... wasn't injured at all... however, he was released for some reason, near the end of the stay that I was finishing here, and.... So, he was doing some work around the Nine Mile camp there... he was on a power pole hooking up a wire, or something... and fell off and broke his back. So... he got all the way through the smokejumpers without an injury, but still got his back broke.

RF Do you remember his reaction at all after that jump, running...?

AG Oh no, he was as cool as a cucumber, he just came walking out... probably whistling through the woods dragging his chute.

RF He realized how close he was?

AG I'm sure he did. [laughs]

RF What else did you... besides jumping off a tower, what were some of the other aspects of training that you had?

AG Well, I have a photograph... in the album I have, of the practice we used... where, we buckled our legs up to the knees to a stake... went down backwards... had to come all the way back up. That was a strenuous exercise... and went through the tires, and over the fences and... had some pretty strenuous exercises. Those fellows knew how to get you in shape. I know that... because I was 120 lb. weakling when I first came in and in two months I weighed 145. They got me up there to about normal weight for a six-footer.

RF Did you feel ready for the first jump?

AG Oh yeah. I... I'd been ready because... we played volleyball at... every evening, you know, out there... with the... with the heavy jumpsuits on. Oh, that was part of our exercise... our training was to play volleyball in those jumpsuits. Eighty pounds with your release rope and your emergency pack and everything... pretty strenuous. I played a game the other day and I couldn't get up to get the ball over the net without a suit on. [laughs] Of course, I wasn't 67 then either.

RF So, did you get... did you get to jump?

AG Not on a fire... never did get to jump on a fire!

RF You just made practice jumps?

AG Just through the training season and ended up... got this hand injury.

RF Do you... do you remember your first jump?

AG Oh yeah. Yep! You give up. It's gone... goodbye world. As soon as you see the chute open above you... all, you want... to do it again immediately. Oh, it's a great feeling. I think it's the same way with the sport parachuting lately. They get it bad when they... when they do it once.

RF But... you were pretty apprehensive before that first...?

AG Oh yes! Everybody I'm sure... they may tell you they weren't, but I think everybody had already resigned themselves to the fact that this is it. [laughs]

RF How'd you feel on the second one then?

AG Oh, that's no... no problem. It's just like deciding to jump over the fence or something... once you see you can do it, that's... no problem to it at all.

RF Were your landings all good?

AG Yeah. We only had..... in '44... one boy who broke an ankle, I believe, in practice. Very few people got hurt in practice... but we were taught strenuously how to... how to land... and, of course, we turned and rolled backwards back in those days. No! We didn't! We did that... they did that later. We rolled forward on our elbow and our arm... our forearm down and rolled forward on... during the first training. Now that could have been dangerous if we'd hit... in the wrong position, but it worked for everybody. Some of the later people, I think, rolled backwards then because the military men use the backward roll.

RF And um, did you get to land in trees in those practice?

AG Not I. Some of them... some of them did. The pictures... in fact, I have... well, I'm sure several people have the landing of the... the... Goosen, I believe was the boy's name that had, made the two point landing that made the King Syndicate all over the whole nation there... after the war was over. But he landed between two trees... of course, he got in and released himself... swung into a tree with his rope before the chute fell. The danger was that if the chute should fall from one of those trees it wouldn't have time to open again.

And we had one fellow in training that... well, this was on a jump. One fellow in '44 that jumped on a fire. Jumped two men on one side of the mountain and... it was near a fire and there was an updraft... one of the men came down pretty near the chosen spot and the other went up about 500 feet when the chute

opened and landed somewhere in the other valley... on the other side of the mountain. We had to jump another man! [laughs] Never... didn't see him again all summer. You could jump one day in one valley and you'd be a week getting back, you know... and then by the time you got back, the fellow who bunked next to you might've jumped in Idaho, or somewhere and not be back for a month.

RF Interesting.... Do you remember...?

AG I remember... summer before last, I think... they had some smokejumpers at Tri-Cities Airport in Tennessee, near Bristol... they had sent some out... must have been just a experiment or maybe publicity, or something... but they stayed out there a few weeks and, uh....

Of course, our fires... deciduous fires, are in the fall... later than the fires here. Spring and fall is when we have the fires there, and they really didn't need them, [smokejumpers] because you can drive a jeep to about any location in the mountains of Blue Ridge. There are very few spots that are as remote as the Rocky Mountains.

RF Even here we're getting quite a few roads now.

AG Yes. And of course, choppers can do a lot that... it couldn't do then. Since then... I've been in touch with aviation pretty much. I've been chairman of the Airport Commission in our town and built a new airport there with State and Federal funds without any cost to the area, and I've been commander of the Civil Air Patrol for 26 years... I have a lieutenant-colonel's rank in the Air Force Auxiliary and. I have called in for Search and Rescue... I've called in helicopters from North Carolina... over from the National Guard units of various areas... and they are a big help when you're searching a mountainous area. You can't get slow enough or low enough with a fixed-wing plane to see most... most wrecks in summertime when the leaves are on.

RF Have you used any parachutists for the rescue?

AG No, no we've never had to use... once we find them... if we find the plane, we can get in too.

RF Do any of your... the people that trained with you stick out in your memory at all?

AG Oh, I can recall if I had the... my list there of those 96 men, I'd recall most of them, but, uh... just haven't had any contact with them. The first reunion they had, they sent me a letter to tell me about it.

RF This was a reunion in Seeley Lake, or something... or was this...?

AG I don't know where it was... out here somewhere, about eleven years ago. And then they had another one six years ago.

Well, my first letter arrived two weeks before the next reunion, five years later. [laughs] They finally... it finally caught up with me... they found me and I got contacted. And then I had registered to come last year to the one they had and... had really intended to come, and I got elected to the State Legislature... and they had a legislative session in the same week. And that was my first session... I had to go report in. But this year... then, I did make reservations earlier and... wanted to make it before I got too old and decrepit [laughs] to get around and see the sights.

RF Do you remember your foreman at all?

AG I remember Cochran, (inaudible). He was a great trainer and he was a great exhibitionist. I think he had worked for a parachute company as a demonstrator, because he did... when we had a jump in competition with the Army paratroopers... it was over here at the stadium in Missoula... and he gave an exhibition jump and climbed the shroud lines before his chute opened.... and everybody thought he was going to crash into the ground and he fed it out slowly and finally let it open.

RF Yeah, that's a trick! [laughs]

AG Yeah, it was a real trick! [laughs] The people in the stands were just mystified.

RF Yeah!

AG Yeah, he, he was a great trainer... and Cooley, I remember Cooley. I understand that he's here, I haven't seen him.

RF Right. He just finished a book.

AG Did he?

RF Yeah, and I guess it just came out this week.

AG Yeah. I published a book.

RF Oh, Yeah?

AG But mine wouldn't pertain to this area... basic grammar for Appalachia, mountaineer. [laughs]

RF Okay. Um, I guess the foremen were spotters, too, so....

AG Yeah, usually they were.

RF Yeah.

AG I met some of the pilots that flew over here.

RF Do you remember anything about them?

AG No, nothing in particular. I know they... they gave you a signal and the spotter hit you on the back. (chuckle)

RF That was it, huh?

AG That was it, yeah.

RF You always got a good spot?

AG Yeah, they... in the training jumps they always had a good windage and a good spot.

RF Well, did you work... you worked the Tillamook fire then?

AG Yes I did.

RF Can you tell me about that?

AG Well....

RF Sounds like it was a real big one.

AG It was a big fire and there was nothing spectacular about anything we did other than the fact that we apparently joined with other fire crews from Oregon and Washington and just... and they had dozers and things in there to try to save the villages and the towns. That was all we could do... we didn't hope to put the fire out, it was too big... 200,000 acres plus, to the best I can recall. At that time, it was the biggest forest fire that the service had had... they said. I don't know if they've had bigger ones since, but....

RF Do you remember about how long you worked on that one?

AG No, I really can't recall because it was so monotonous, just over and over everyday... you camped out and raked leaves and fire lines... and [it] got so monotonous that there was nothing that stands out in my mind about that fire. But I don't know how many of our men went but... somehow or other, I was in on it. I'm sure because I wasn't jumping that summer is why I was in on it... for one reason.

RF Do you remember any other fires that you worked on?

AG No, none specifically.

RF How many did you work on?

AG Well, just the few that we had that they could get to without jumping... and I don't recall just how many of those there were. I recall one that we had after I got back home in Virginia... I had a partner in the radio station over there and he was from down in Tennessee and we were fighting a leaf fire. In the fall, the leaves gather from the deciduous trees... get about knee deep, and they get dry... they can really burn. They

just roll on the ground like the crown does in the top of the trees... and it turned... the wind turned on us, and he started trying to go up a steep cliff which he couldn't get up... he was just slipping back into the fire. And I remembered enough of my training to pull him over into a rock pile where there were very few leaves, and we just lay face down in that rock pile for about fifteen minutes and it went around us... and no one was hurt, but we could've been hurt if we'd gone up the mountainside. And that's about the same thing that happened to the unit a few years after I was here... when those... I believe it was seven people got caught on... when the fire changed on them.

RF When you first came out here in '44, do you remember anything about how the Forest Service felt about... about you? I know... I guess it was '43 when they first started using CPS?

AG Yeah, uh... I think our local people were very congenial. I never did see any friction. There might have been between individuals, but they treated us just like they did any of their other employees. It just didn't cost them anything for us to work. [chuckle]

RF I guess not, huh. I understand what you made about \$2.00 a month or something.

AG Two and a half, yeah. Buy you toothpaste.

RF Did that create much of a hardship for you when you were...?

AG No, I remember... it was too far for me to go back home if we had some days off... so, I went out and worked on the farms, and so forth. Back then a dollar an hour was a huge wage, so I baled hay out here on some of these farms... and I set the record for picking apples in the Bitterroot Valley. But I don't know if anyone's broken it since then or not but... some of the Indians... farmer had picked a hundred bushels in a day and several of us went up and camped out... so I said I was gonna break the record so I got up before daylight and picked, by feeling the trees... and picked till it got dark. And I picked a 110 bushels and that was \$31.00 at 30 cents a bushel... a lot of money to earn in one day. They said nobody else had picked that many bushels in a day at that time... but I'm sure some of these fellows... maybe gotten out there and taken vitamins and steroids and broke that record by now.

RF Is that something that a lot of you did on your days off, you'd try to make a little bit of extra money?

AG I think everybody did, I got hooked up with a carpenter there... you couldn't buy lumber and things to build houses, and things... so this fellow would buy two or three old houses and remodel one out of them, and so forth... so I helped him with carpenter work, painting and... on Saturdays and evenings... in those long summer evenings, and various things. I was able to pick up a little spending money to... to do me.

RF Uh-

AG Now, I remember another thing about Missoula... I went to the Wesleyan Methodist Church, over in town, and got acquainted with several people of the church. As I said, I was staying at the Sigma Chi house here and we would walk to and from church... you know, on Sundays. The younger girl, I can't recall her name but... that went to that church, had... her father owned a little sandwich shop... a restaurant. Well now, there was a boy staying at the University that played football... his name was Paul [Henry Williamson] something... might have been Johnson or Williams, I can't recall... he was the only black athlete... in fact, he was the only black individual in the town... and they had signs on the pubs along here then... said, "No Injuns" on all the doors... and he couldn't eat at any of the places.

The only place that he could eat was at the bus station... or at this girl's father's shop... he'd let... let him eat, and... it was sort of embarrassing. You'd... we'd be walking back toward the college and stop to get a coke, or something, somewhere... and realize that Paul couldn't go in. Even though he was a good athlete and was considered a star among the few male athletes they had during the war there.

RF Thank God that's changed.

AG Yeah, it has, I noticed that. There is no segregation at all now, I don't think... in this area. Of course, I'm from the South where it was rampant then... at the time, but it's... it's... they're pretty moderate now everywhere and... I think the fact that the government has a lot to do with the economy here and they had brought them in, may have helped a lot... after the war.

RF Can you tell me your feelings when you found out the war was over?

AG Almost everybody was happy that the war was over. Uh... but we were out there on this survey party... about five or six of us in that hot desert sand, and it would be 110 [degrees] in the daytime. And... at night we'd have to dig trenches to put our sleeping bag in. We had some cots... we tried it the first night... but you would freeze yourself stiff if you slept on a cot. The wind would blow like crazy and the water would freeze up in your water buckets at night... in August now. So we dug trenches and stayed in them and put our sleeping bags down out of the wind when they....

But anyway, uh... we were very elated to hear that the war was over... and then our crew chief... he was too. He was a fellow near retirement age at that time... but he was happy about it. He said, "Well, let's pack up and go." [He] said, "We'll go take a couple days off." And... while I was out there I found a beautiful set of big horn sheep antlers... two complete turns. Boy, they were beautiful! And a big set of deer antlers... and I was bringing those back, when we came back and... our vehicle

broke down, we had to catch a bus and ride it on into town. So I lost... when we brought the vehicle in, someone had taken my antlers with them.

That particular area had been covered with dust and sand during the 1935... no, 1928, I believe... dust storms that covered the country. The reason we were pretty sure of the date... we dug till... we found a... an old cabin... a roof sticking out and you could see the top of the fencepost... so we dug all of the sand around and dug... cleaned that cabin out and made us a cook shack out of it. And it was papered with newspapers on the wall. The last date we could find was 1928. So that must've been when the dust storms came... and we saw what had been a new Model-T ford and a hay rake sitting out by the old barn... it had covered it completely up.

And another thing that most people don't remember... or don't realize, is that the sands shift. Now, that area had been surveyed back in 1888, or something... but anyway, they set rocks... with three notches for a township corner and two for a section, one for a quarter section and... but those rocks had drifted maybe 50 to 500 feet. And we'd sometimes find them, but they weren't where they should be, so we put down leather markers. But the whole sand had just shifted and moved the rocks. And of course, the Midwest has taken steps now about planting trees to try to keep that from happening again... if a dust storm comes.

RF Can you remember at the end of the war whether there were any of your fellow CPSers that wanted to continue in the parachute project?

AG I don't know, because the... several of them were still here in '46, but I was released the last day of '45... and I don't know if some of them did stay another year or two, or not.

RF You can't remember any decision that, maybe the Forest Service made, or something, saying that they weren't gonna mix the CO's and the vets.

AG No, I hadn't heard about anything like that. It might have happened after the war ended, I don't know.

RF Yeah, it's just something I had heard about....

AG But I do know that Phil Stanley told me that he just settled down out here and didn't go back East... because he liked it out here. I don't know what he worked at, but he said...

RF Photo finishing.

AG Is that right? Well, that's a good profession. Good place to get good photos, too, isn't it?

RF Yeah.

AG Sure thing.

RF A few... a few people that you must have been training with settled out here.

AG Yeah, I've seen a lot of people that said they liked this country and just settled down.

RF What kind of a person do you think it takes to be a smokejumper or... or even just a firefighter? What kind of person?

AG Well, either one of two kind. You have to be either real "devil may care" and want to go out just for mountains that haven't been climbed yet, or else, you go to... have to be really be devoted to... to the cause, one or the other there. Probably a little... both in a person in his 20's. Because... everybody is seeking something, a little challenging I suppose. But when you get acclimated to the... to the wilderness and the big outdoors, and so forth, then it has a very special appeal to you.

I know I used to have to deliver supplies during that summer I wasn't jumping and... I would row a boat across Seeley Lake till there were blisters on my hands, you know... taking supplies across... and I... ever since, I wished I could come back and ride on Seeley Lake with a motor on my boat... just to see what it looks like.

RF You ought to go up there, yeah.

AG Well, when I flew out... I have no transportation to go anywhere, see... I had to walk four miles to town and back to get breakfast this morning. Good exercise, though.

RF Yeah, sure is. I need to come back to this Japanese fire bomb threat because you got me thinking about it now. Now, is this something that everybody was aware of when...?

AG Well, I think all the smokejumpers knew about it... they had to! They'd say, "Boy, we had a big... had a big day yesterday, there was a lot of 'em."

RF Yeah.

AG We had as high as 81 fires, I can recall, in one day. Now not all of them were set by the Japanese bombs, some of 'em were set by lightning you know... as usual, but... they launched these... these balloons... on the trade winds, and they were... had a large circle... steel circle, around on each... on... about every so many inches, or feet, there would be a sand bag and incendiary bomb, and... it was set by altitude and when the altimeter said that you were a 100 feet in land... I mean a 100 feet closer to the ground, which means you were getting it farther inland, it would drop one and the balloon would go up... another distance... and by the time it got to the... to the crest of the Rocky Mountain range there, it had dropped probably all of them.

And, uh... then it had an anti-personnel bomb that exploded and destroyed the balloon. Now the only one I know of we really captured was... well, somewhere in the area. There was one that was found in... near Bend, Oregon, that a Sunday School teacher and five of his students found, in the trees, and [they] pulled on the cords and it exploded and killed all of them.

But... other than that... it's the only casualties I know of, and as you... the trade winds come in from Japan... that area, they hit Oregon and Washington and then they come farther in... they get down into Idaho and through Montana and then into the edge of Canada. But by then they've lost all their bombs, see... by the time they get to Canada. Might've had some drop in... oh... maybe one other state on the boundary. But most of them were in about four states here.

And... my understanding is, that they did quit sending them just before the war ended, thinking that their mission was a failure. That they hadn't done us any harm... it was just a morale destroyer, but you could think what would have happened to the morale of the people if they'd heard a 100 bombs had been dropped on the mainland in one day... or 50 bombs. Even though they were just incendiaries.

But think what would happen now if... if those were... had atomic fallout. Launch them without any sound or any warning and no way to trace it. Fortunately, there were only a few... few states that could be affected [laughs] But don't go moving away. Because...[laughs] [inaudible] our allies are in that area now.

RF So the smokejumpers you think were being used, in part, to combat this threat... this... specifically?

AG Well, we were used to put out the fires. That was our... our use... but to put out the fires was partly due to keep the public from knowing that we were being bombed and that was the... to keep the morale of the people up, to keep them from panicking. They... people might have moved out of this area, see.

RF Right.

AG You don't know what might have happened. We moved all the Japanese people out of the northwest area there already, so... so they were safe.

RF I have a friend who's parents were moved out. Getting near the end of my tape.

[END OF SIDE A]

[SIDE B]

AG ...outdoor country.

RF Yeah. Yeah, because you wouldn't want to be attached with the war effort. [background noise] Well, do you have any other experiences, just from that period... things that you would like to mention... impressions... anything about smokejumping or about

the people you worked with?

AG No, I have only, uh... fond memories and complimentary honors for everybody that was in the association... our management, the Forest Service personnel.... Oh! Let me tell you one other experience I had.

RF Okay.

AG The only time I've ever been arrested... [chuckle] I was arrested by the FBI, the chief of police, and the high sheriff one evening. I was working out on a project... about 25 miles out of town. We were clearing an area down there for something, and I'd been driving a... a dump truck, and so forth... and came in on Saturday... on the bus back into town... and when I got to the depot, there were all these law men standing there... grabbed me! They said, "You're under arrest!" "For what?! What have I done wrong?!" "Murder! You're under arrest for murder!" "Who did I murder?" And they said, "You know who you murdered." [chuckle]

So I found out later, that, uh... some... somebody had murdered somebody down in that area, and they had heard that he was loose in that area, that he was wearing a red plaid wool shirt... which I happened to be wearing, and... when... I caught the bus by myself out in the middle of the country there, the bus driver stopped at the next little village and called in and said, "I think I've got your man." Well, when we got into town... this was Saturday evening and of course, the offices were closed and... I didn't know anybody to get in touch with to... to identify me. Finally they got a hold of an assistant department manager over at the Forest Service... said, "He's home." Somebody knew him... some of the officers did... and he said, "Yes, I don't know him personally, but I know he's on our staff and is working out in that area there."

So, they let me go, but... when they first caught me... I had a little athletic bag with my work clothes in it... I'd changed clothes before I caught the bus, and they... one of them said, "What have got in that bag?" And I said, "Just some old dirty clothes." He said, "Bloody clothes?!" [He] grabbed my bag and tore the zipper off it. He wanted to find out what was going on there. Of course, you can... you can understand, the law people had... had to work on every clue they had, and had to protect the public and themselves. I didn't feel hard at them.

RF Yeah. [laughs] Sounds like you had some pretty wild experiences... smokejumping would have been a little bit tamer in some ways.

AG Have you had very many people talk about the Fred McMurray movie that was made about that time?

RF No....

AG Well, right after the war they were showing it around all the theatres, and someone found that I had a lot of these

photographs. And... so they would borrow my photographs and put around the Marquis or... there at the theatre... the one when Fred McMurray was going to be on... and of course, they've shown it over and over for the last forty years. Um... our training films were used for the actual jumps, you know, and then Fred McMurray would get up off the ground and rescue the maiden or whatever he was doing there. [laughs] We didn't see any maidens in distress while we were out there.

RF Not a typical smokejumping experience, huh? [laughs]

AG No, I don't think so... but... he did come to our Nine Mile camp out there, I think... and had some shots made there. I wasn't personally there at the time.

I know we had a camp nurse, can't remember her name, but she was... I think she was a savior for all of us people who... minor injuries, and... such as a broken hand, and so forth. And in fact, she... and I believe, the camp managers wife might have been up all the time, but other than that, there were no women around at all.

And... during that summer I did a lot of other work, such as driving a... first time I've ever driven a 12 speed truck. They put me to hauling hay down at the Remount Station... with a big trailer behind it... stuff of that nature.

I remember "Pete the packer", that packed me into Boles Point... when I went to stay that period there... I think they say it's about fifty miles from the nearest trail, out to it... and he took several pack mules and packed me in enough stuff to last me and... had my dog. I made a wooden pack saddle and I had a two gallon rubber-coated bag for him to carry his own water, and I carried mine in a 10 gallon bag, from a spring about two miles down the hill... straight up a trail... but the time I met the bear... he [Jeep] didn't have his... his water bag, and I had a sling shot... no weapons anywhere back in the National Forest... and it was also in the Blackfoot Indian Reservation... so all I had was a sling shot.

I had grouse though, any time I needed it, so I could kill me a grouse. I killed one squirrel with... those red pine squirrels were so tough you couldn't eat them... so I didn't try any more squirrels.

Well, it's pretty isolated and the bears would dig the garbage pit out every night. That was one of... that's "Jeep's" job to chase the bears away... but I was afraid he'd be killed... run up into a couple of bears, but they'd usually trot off down the hill temporarily.

The big elk would come and they made it [the lookout] out of four... oh, probably, two or three hundred foot pines... and four poles... then the tower sitting up on top of it... but those elk would come and scrape against the tower and just shake it when it was... well, I'd be trying to sleep at night and... it'd shake me out of the bed almost.

And it came a snow one time... I was lying in the sun, getting me a sun tan out there on the canvas... came this dark cloud, and I rushed up the steps, and suddenly, I had about an inch of snow... in August. By the time I got back down, it'd

already quit snowing and it melted out in about thirty minutes.

RF Did you spot many fires from up there on that lookout?

AG Not a lot. I had spent two terms in a tower on the peaks of Otter in Virginia near Roanoke and I'd had a lot of experience at that and... we had other points that we had to correlate our lines with, and... together the three or four of us that could cover the area, did spot several fires.

RF Yeah, now how'd you go about notifying?

AG We had... had a telephone. Had no radios then but we did have a telephone line. And believe me, when a thunderstorm came, the balls of fire would come in on the line... even though you'd thrown the switch... it burst right in the middle of the room and tons of fiber would come off the tin roof... but it was well grounded... and I learned to sleep right through it.

RF Any other experiences you want to relate?

AG I don't know of anything that I could contribute that some of the other fellows wouldn't know more about. I'd like, I'd like to... learn all the other information you get, you'll publish something, I guess, won't you?

RF Yeah, I hope we do.

AG Yeah.

RF That's supposed to be the end result. Yeah, hopefully you'll all be able to find out about it some way or another, too. Well, thank you very much, that was a real interesting perspective you contributed and we really need the material from the [inaudible].

AG Well, if I combine all the various thoughts on any one issue there, you can get a... sort of a median idea of what the thoughts and feelings were of people. Everybody might not have been as favorably impressed as I was, but....

RF So far everybody's had really warm feelings about the whole experience, and everything, and enjoyed the chance to get involved in the smokejumping project during the war. Some of them really enjoyed that opportunity.

AG Well, thank you very much for taking your time.

RF Yeah, well, thank you.

[END OF INTERVIEW]