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

Oral History Number: 149-005a
Interviewee: Charlie McLaughlin
Interviewers: Ernest Kraft
Date of Interview: May 15, 1965
Project: National Bison Range Oral History Project

Charlie McLaughlin: [unintelligible]. It was really rough.

Ernest Kraft: Let's see...This is May 15, 1965, and this is an interview with Charlie McLaughlin of Dixon, Montana, who was possibly one of the first butchers, or the first butcher in connection with the disposal program at the National Bison Range. Charlie, when were you born?

CM: I was born in 1889.

EK: Where at?

CM: In Collingwood, Ontario, Canada.

EK: You came to this country in 19—

CM: I came out here to Dixon in the fall of 1916—September 1916.

EK: You started a meat-market? Is that what you did here [unintelligible]?

CM: Yes. My dad and I ran a meat-market down there.

EK: What's your first recollection of this Bison Range job? Rose [Frank H. Rose] come and contact you, or how were you hired?

CM: Well, my first recollection was the buffalo I shot and didn't kill. Mr. Rose came in—this was early in the fall. Bryon Nowlin was the assistant warden here at the time. Peter called me or came in and asked me if I would come out and butcher a buffalo.

I said, "Okay."

I came out. Mr. Rose was gone, and Allen was here and he said, "You have to shoot this buffalo."

I said, "No. I came out to butcher a buffalo" I said, "Mr. Rose asked me to come out to butcher a buffalo not to shoot them.

Bryon said, "You have to shoot him."

I said, "You're the boss. Are you telling me to?"

He said, "Yes, I'm telling you to."

I said, "Okay."

I went out, rode out...I couldn't tell you where it is, it wasn't far from headquarters. They wanted a nice bull, with not good horns—a young bull. I was riding a big old bay that Andy Hodges had here, one of his pets. He was ring-boned awfully badly, but he was a beautiful horse. I was up above the buffalo. I rode down on them, and I picked out my bull. I got off the horse, and I shot him and [slaps hand on table] he went flatter than a pancake. I rode out quick, I just turned around like this to pick up my horse's reins, [unintelligible]. My bull was off and running across the flat there [laughs]. With the horse I had, why, there was no possible chance that...but I went on down to the creek and waded there to find a place to get across without swimming. I finally found a place, and I went over on that other side and I stirred up three old isolated bulls there. I was sure that they weren't too bold, but I made them get up anyway. They got up and ready to go war, and I went on up the creek. On the other side of the creek, I went on up to that square turn in the fence, that basin...What is that basin?

EK: Alexander Basin.

CM: Alexander Basin. Oh, it was just lousy with buffalo. But before I went, why, here was a drop of blood on the gravel on...What is that, the south side?

EK: North side.

CM: North side of the creek. When I got a cross on to the other side, it was all grass—no more sign at all. Well, all the rest of the afternoon, I rode all through that bunch of buffalo. I don't know whether anybody else had ever done that, but I did. I rode all through that bunch of buffalo looking for that bull. I couldn't find him, and I had to come in and gave up.

Well, Mr. Rose never said one word to me about that incident at all until the following spring. He called up, and he said, "Charlie, the trapper found a dead buffalo up above the"—they call that the substation—"at Ravalli." He said, "If I come down and pick you up, will you go up and help us skin it out?"

I said, "Sure."

So he come down and we went down to Ravalli. That was quite an experience too. Old road, muddy road—muddy and slippery—and Rose driving. [laughs] We went on up there, and we found the buffalo.

Rose looked at it, and "No," he says, "That's not the one you shot last fall."

I said, "No." I said, "That one just died naturally of old age."

He was old, and his horns were all stubbed off. So we skinned it out, but that was the only word. He never said one word about that to me. What he said to Allen, I don't know, but Allen didn't stay long after that.

EK: The first time you butchered, how many did you help take?

CM: How many did we kill the first year?

EK: Would you guess?

CM: I don't. There weren't very many. We had a set of racks down here, then another set of racks on up the flat—farther up the flat. Then we had to set up there where the corrals are. I think that was all, if I remember right, and it was a slow, very slow, procedure. It was right out in the open range, and we had a man with a team and a stone boat. We'd shoot a buffalo, and he'd have to come out with the team and a stone boat to pick him up. Maybe sometimes you'd have to come a quarter of a mile to pick that buffalo up and drag him into the racks and then hang him up. We didn't get very many buffalo, and I don't know, they might have killed more after I was through that year.

I know one day we went over to Pauline Coulee—the head of Pauline Coulee. There were Rose and myself—I think somebody else was along—and two men with teams and stone boats. Slight skiff of snow on the ground. We shot two buffalo way up near the head of Pauline Coulee and bled them, loaded them on the stone boats. Well, that's all downhill. That's way down hill that way those boys with stone boats and those teams [unintelligible] awful time. It's always going this way on them. It took us all day long to get those two bulls over and get them hung up, so they abandoned anything like that. The most we killed was up at the upper racks.

EK: They shot a lot of them in Alexander Basin, didn't they? Over the hill from the slaughterhouse?

CM: I don't think we shot too many in Alexander Basin. I know this Depner (?), he was the one of the men from South Dakota that came up here to do the buffalo hunting. There was two of them that came up. I don't remember the other guy's name, but this other fellow was out with old Smith Riley all the time, and Depner was the buffalo hunter and butcher. They sent us off one day and over to Alexander Basin. Depner was a good shot—he was a real good shot—but he was afraid of buffalo. We rode over there, and of course, we had a man with a team and a stone boat following us up and a helper along with him. Depner's orders was to get some younger bulls—I don't know why—but younger bulls.

We got over there—Alexander Basin—and Depner says, “Now, watch it,” he said, “they'll take after us.” There was some old cows and calves around the fringe, and of course, they threw their heads up and, by god, they started for us. Depner says, “We better get out of here.” We rode on down over a little draw and into a little draw, and they come right on over. We rode down over another little hump and pulled up there and they had quit then, but they had put the run on old Smith Riley and this other guy. They put the run on him before that.

EK: His name wasn't Trisky?

CM: His name wasn't Trisky, no. No, no. Trisky was in the [Forest] Service. This other fellow just came over with this Depner, and I just don't remember his name at all. I didn't have any contact him. We were up there at the upper racks, but I don't think the take was very many that year.

EK: Was Depner hunting that first year?

CM: Yeah. That was the first year. That was the only year he was ever here.

EK: When did he ever get the buffalo? Did he finally get started shooting, or did he—

CM: Yes. He got some buffalo. He had long shots, but he was a good shot. He got them. I don't remember, I don't have any idea how many they got that year, but the take was pretty small.

EK: You figured that that was two years before they took any elk out, that they butchered buffalo?

CM: Well, they had started on elk. They had started to kill elk. The elk were scattered all over here, and you could drive out...We had the old Model-T Fords, and you could drive—they'd be lying around here—and you could drive around through. But when they started shooting them, why, they went right to the high points. I don't know who was in on that, but they shot some up there. Of course, they soured before they could ever get them back in, so they had to abandon that program. They did have, I remember, they had the racks down here loaded with those big bull elk at one time. They would hold...well, it was 12 elk. They were as big as the buffalo. Damn big elk. They were big. After they got so they had to go way up after them, the weather wasn't cold enough, and they would...Even if it had been cold, I think they would have soured, because they had no way of lifting them up or raising them up, so that that side that was lying down...that'd just...They quit that. Then we started in on the buffalo. It was pretty much hit-and-miss and here and there. Rose did some shooting, and Rose and Depner did the shooting.

EK: You have any recollection of taking meat to Ronan and storing it in cold-storage plant up there?

CM: I know that they took a lot of big old bull—skinned-out, big old bull—meat up there and stored it in the locker. I know they did that. They said they had the locker up there full of it.

EK: That's something that just came out. Nobody brought it up until just a little bit ago. There's no record of ever however many went out there or anything?

CM: There wasn't much record of anything, and there wasn't much management in anything. This deal was what I would call a crash program. The Range was depleted. They had to do something, they started to do it, and they were going to go. Rose admitted he didn't know anything about the buffalo, but he said, "We've got this to do, and we'll go ahead and do it." So that was it. I know that there was a lot the old bull meat that...I never took any up there, see, but I know that's where it went. I figured they ate a lot of bull buffalo bologna up in that part of the country there for quite some time, because I never did hear of them selling any of it.
[laughs]

EK: The first time I got any wind of this was some guy was telling me that they used to get it in the schools. The school used to get this buffalo meat.

CM: Yes. It's the school would get...The different schools would get—

EK: He said it was usually just old tough...He didn't care for buffalo meat after having to eat that stuff.

CM: Well, I don't know.

EK: He said it came out of these lockers in Ronan, and that it had stayed too long. He said it was hung in there as much as a year at a time.

CM: Yes. They might have done that later, yes.

EK: I'm just going to read you this a little bit here now, Charlie. This record that we have is one that was made up by Mrs. Kinney (?). Do you remember her? She was a clerk in the office at the time that Frank Rose came.

CM: Was she the wife of the storekeeper here at Moiese?

EK: I don't know. Could be. Her name was Kinney, Mary Kinnney—Kenney or Kinney. In 1924, it says there was 107 calves born, and that there was a total of 675 buffalo and that they counted 33 additional buffalo later on. So, that would make around 708 buffalo that they figured was in here, according to her figures.

CM: Well, that's what they figured—roughly what they figured—around 700 head of buffalo, and there were a lot of buffalo. That Alexander Basin was just full of buffalo. That was their favorite spot over there.

EK: Now, in 1925 is when it starts. It said, "Butchered 218 head of buffalo."

CM: Well, I had in my mind it was around 275, 76 head. Just in my mind. I didn't—

EK: That's an awful lot of buffalo isn't it?

CM: Yes, that's a lot of buffalo.

EK: Would you say that you helped with a good share of that butchering?

CM: Yes, I did.

EK: How long of a program did it last? When did it start, and when did it end?

CM: Oh, that's dates again.

EK: Well, I mean, did you start in the fall and butcher all winter, or did you butcher all time of the year?

CM: No, no. When it started to get cool, we started to butcher, and we butchered on through. I just can't remember the...but I would say we were out here a couple months.

EK: How many of you were there working on it?

CM: They were building the corrals up there at the time...Had been working on them, and were working on them. What was the name of the old carpenter that had charge there?

EK: Wasn't Forester?

CM: No, Paul Streit (?).

EK: Paul Streit, that's right.

CM: He was the boss up there, and outside of Rose, he was the only person in the whole works that had any authority. Now, I butchered and Rose would tell me what he wanted, but as far as saying that I was head-butcher or had any control over anything, why, no he never told me that, or I never asked for it as far as that's concerned.

EK: What kind of money did you make, just for curiosity? Do you remember?

CM: Three dollars a day.

EK: Three dollars a day for which you—

CM: [laughs]

EK: [laughs] That wasn't too much a head, was it?

CM: Well, of course, those days three dollars was three dollars.

EK: That was 1925 that we just talked about, right? To go to the next year, it said that they only took 62. That would have been 1926.

CM: That was year of the 50 elk?

EK: No.

CM: No?

EK: Not yet, Charlie. I don't think. I'll have to get this other sheet. You can look at that [unintelligible].

CM: I think the second year that we butchered buffalo, they shipped it. Didn't they ship a carload?

EK: '26? Live sold, 388. Here's your buffalo...or your elk figures. 1926, live sale, 388. Those are ones that went back to Middleborough, Massachusetts. Ike Melton [William J.B. "Ike" Melton] went back with them.

CM: Yes, but Ike went to California—

EK: Yes, with some buffalo.

CM: —[unintelligible] with buffalo.

EK: Let's see, that's right...It would be under live sales, but it don't show anything—

CM: What's this? Forty?

EK: Four. That's male and female. That's just a little figure they use for males and females. Live, four and 13—four males and 13 females.

CM: What's this 32?

EK: That's live, but that's in 1931, yeah.

CM: Well, they shipped an express-car load of young [unintelligible] to Randolph Hearst's estate, San Simeon, California.

EK: That's right. I have that all on tape from Ike. He told me that story.

CM: Ike went down with them. He went right long, because that second year, why, Ike was our main shooter—Ike and Rose. Mostly everybody else had a shot now and then.

EK: Here is the record that has been refuted through this office in the years, and there's quite a discrepancy. See, in 1925, they don't list anything, and they only list 461 at the end of the year. They only list 45 being slaughtered in 1926. You see?

CM: What's this in 1928?

EK: Yes, clear up here in 1928 is the first time they give any indication of a big... '27 plus four. Here's your slaughter on those—145. '27 they were supposed to have taken 174 so that would have been the year you were talking about, probably, or the first time they did kill a big bunch, but it just doesn't compare with the other set of figures. It's just through—

CM: When did they start to kill in the slaughterhouse?

EK: Oh, let's see, where can I find that? How many years did you butcher outside before you started using the slaughterhouse? Can you tell me that?

CM: Butcher outside, there was—

EK: No, on these here racks.

CM: My recollection, it was one, two, three years.

EK: Of outside butchering?

CM: Of outside butchering.

EK: That's what I kind of think too. I got a book here that tells me what years these buildings were finished, if I can find it. [long pause] That's the thing that got me curious about this whole thing. We've got three of those [unintelligible] records, and they're all different. Some of them don't tell you that they ever started butcher until 1927, which is the year after Cy [Clarence "Cy" Young] was here, and I really think that—

CM: Well, Cy came in here the year that they shipped elk, and we had two years of buffalo butchering before that.

EK: That'd be '24?

CM: Well, you said that these '25 and '26 was the year Cy came and then they shipped the elk, and then '25 was the big butcher year. '24 was when they started.

EK: That's real good, Charlie. I want to look again [unintelligible].

CM: Because in '26, I had the Continental Oil bulk plant in Dixon, and I couldn't come out and work. I delivered gas out to Moiese store that they used on the trucks to haul the elk down, and I was busy. I never got out to see any the procedure on the elk. I heard a lot. [laughs] Never got here. I delivered a tank of gas out to Moiese store. I started from Dixon at eight o'clock one morning, and I got back to Dixon at five o'clock that afternoon. On this side of the railroad-crossing—the last railroad-crossing—that was just to dip in there, and there was a Fox film car in there and it was just mired. Mud was oozing over the running boards, and I couldn't go that way, so I went up across Mission Creek, and up around Lambert's hill and around. I got stuck on the way up there. [laughs]

[unintelligible background noise and discussion]

These buffalo went up to Ronan—I couldn't swear to that, but I know that was common knowledge that was where they were going—they were butchered out. On that load of buffalo, they were the old big buffalo. I understood at the time they were getting 125 dollars for the head scalp and 50 dollars for the hides—175 dollars. [unintelligible] that paid for the buffalo. I know they shipped one scalp, and head to the King of Sweden, and there wa other big shots that were given those big heads.

EK: [unintelligible] I suppose?

CM: [laughs] That was Henry Hendrickson's (?) job—punching holes in a little square piece of tin, a number. He'd punch the hole with a nail, or punch a number with a nail, to correspond so that they could keep the heads and scalps together.

EK: Charlie, they started to do that movie in 1930. The Fox movie.

CM: This was a Fox film car that was out there, and I don't know what they were...probably working up something. Whether they were out for any shots of the elk or not, I don't know, but that's what it was, was a Fox film car.

EK: You said that you thought that was in 1926.

CM: I think that was in '26, yes. That was the year they shipped the elk. I remember that particularly, because that was one hell of a day I had the gas out here. They were all out of gas, here, and they were hauling these elk down, [unintelligible]. The butchering that year was

terrible, because it was just mud all over. We had lots of different kinds of weather, but...I don't remember...I wish old Cy was here to tell us what year that we had that...that must have been in '25 that we had that real severe drop in temperature.

EK: That was the year that Ike went down to California.

CM: Yes.

EK: Because he talked about that.

CM: Yeah. We were working here, and we were working up at the upper...up here, right above headquarters, and just froze us out. We went on in town, and coming out the next morning—had an old Model T—and had a flat tire and the tire was frozen on. Couldn't get it off. So I called up Rose, and on account of the weather, I thought maybe he'd lay off.

I said, "Do you want us to come out tomorrow?"

He said, "Yes, yes, yes. We've got to kill a buffalo."

So, we got fixed up, and came out the next morning. I said we, it was Fred Gonyer (?), a fellow from Dixon who was a butcher. He would ride out with me, and we came out and we had a flat in Ronan. [unintelligible] Came out and went in the office and changed our clothes, and Rose said, "You take this man, and you go up to the upper corrals and kill buffalo." [unintelligible]. He said, "I'll send a man with a team up."

We went on up, and they had a tent and a Sibley stove up there that the boys used building the corral. Went in there and got warmed up and got some water. A little spring down in there someplace, and we got water—two or three pails of water—and put it alongside the stove to warm it up a little bit. I know we waited and waited and waited for that man with a team. It was 11 o'clock when he got out there. Gee! I said, "Well hell, we might as well eat dinner now and eat our lunch now, and we can just go to work." They had a bunch of old bulls up there. I was wondering—they were standing up there on the side hill above the slaughterhouse in that big field [unintelligible] humps on their backs, and—

EK: They were in the pens though?

CM: They were in the pens, yes. But that's a big pen. [laughs]

I said, "Let's take some hay out on the stone boat and see what we can do." So we took a bunch of hay on the stone boat, and put little pile of hay here and 30 feet over another little pile. These old bulls come down and wanted to eat the pile. I shot two, and I went down in with the first one and I started working on it. The boys went back to get the other one. We got those hung up, and we went out and got two more. The sun was shining down in there, and it was

beautiful—it was beautiful. But it was colder than hell, but it was beautiful. That sun was shining in there. Then, a little after four o'clock, the sun dropped down over the hill there. I'm telling you, it's cold then.

I said, "When we get this one hung up, we're through." Well, that's for sure. My hand was wet, and I got down here on the steel and it just stuck right there. I had to put it in a pail of water to get my fingers off that steel. So we came on down and went in the office, and Mr. Rose said, "What did you do?"

I said, "We hung up four buffalo." I thought that was not very good

He said, "That's fine, just fine."

Well, I thought, Mr. Rose, if that's fine then that's about what we'll hang up. [laughs] We hung up there for four days, and nobody stuck their nose out there, believe me. There wasn't a soul that stuck their nose out there. Those old bulls were cooperative as hell. We just hauled that stone boat load of hay out there. [laughs] They'd come right down and spread out there, and you could walk along and shoot your bull down. Hell, they'd even come up and eat hay off the stone boat. The last four we hung up—they were rigged for four—the last one we hung up it looked like a Christmas tree up there with all those buffalo. Then they came up from headquarters, and they came up way, long late in the afternoon. Hell, we were coming down from work. I don't know what they were going to do up there, but these were all old bulls and they were all hog-dressed. These were all hog-dressed. The ones that went up to Ronan were almost all butchered down here, and / or skinned out. One thing I used to have trouble with, I never get the orders coordinated so that when they wanted a skinned-out buffalo, we could skin it out when it was killed. We'd always have to hog-dress it, and then two or three, days afterwards they wanted a buffalo skinned out. Well, by that time, they were mostly always pretty well froze up, and it was a hell of a job.

EK: Kind of hard to skin a frozen buffalo, isn't it?

CM: Oh, Jesus! [laughs]

EK: This is what I'm looking for. I should be able to tell you here, when the slaughterhouse was built. [long pause] On the right page. There's a little barn up at the slaughterhouse. That was built in—12 by 15—built in 1938. That little saddle barn.

That's the hide-house. That was built in 1947. Then the slaughterhouse building was built in 1927. They completed—

CM: '27, yes.

EK: —'26, so they probably built a lot of it in '26, and it blew down once, I understand.

CM: Oh, did it?

EK: They had a bunch of it up, and a high wind come up and it blew down a section of it?

CM: It was completed in '27, so they killed there in '27.

EK: Yes, they would have done the fall butchering in '27.

CM: Yes.

EK: But, that still—

CM: Who was the superintendent then?

EK: Rose, until '30.

CM: Rose was there until '30.

EK: But, you see, they don't even list any being butchered in '27 in this book—in this set of records. Well, those are elk, that's the wrong one. Let's see what it says in '27—248 butchered. That would have been '27, and 62 in 1926, and 218 in 1925—butchered. But this other record doesn't show that.

It isn't anything real important, but I'd just like to try to...if we could get a little...I think you're probably right. [long pause]

This here's a record that shows in 1924 that there was 197 taken. It says "sold or donated." That wouldn't coincide with the figures that you knew. Here's your set of records for 1925, nothing, 1926, 45. 1927, the year they went to the slaughterhouse according to that there, they were supposed to have taken 174. So that doesn't leave any big outside butchering according to this. That's all I was trying to dig into, really, but I'm pretty sure what you said that they must have had at least one big outside butchering.

CM: There was one year that they killed a lot of buffalo. What they were doing was cutting down on the old critters and the old bulls. That's what they were—

EK: The agency at that time got a lot of animals—

CM: Yes, they got a lot of meat for the meat. Stew, I guess, for the Indians. They got considerable. Of course, what they did after it was butchered I didn't know too much about because—

EK: What are your recollections of this Trisky? Cy tells me a story about Trisky, and he thought maybe you told it to him, about him shooting some buffalo?

CM: Well, Trisky, I don't know that I ever saw the man, but I knew that he was assistant out here, wasn't he?

EK: He was an inspector is what I've been able to dig up him. Rose said that he'd come out here on inspection trips.

CM: Well, he was here when Hodges was here.

EK: Oh, I didn't know that.

CM: I don't ever remember of him coming back when Rose was here, but here's the setup. Old Hodges came in one day, and he said that they had two old bulls up on the range that—I think there was something wrong with their testicles were froze or something like that—and they wanted to get to kill them and dress them out. He said, "I have made arrangements if they were killed on that side of the Range for a man from St. Ignatius to come up and help butcher them out." He said, "If they're killed on this side, will you come up and help us butcher them out?"

I said, "Yes."

EK: This was Hodges?

CM: That was Hodges, and I never heard any more of it until later. I kind of asked about it, and they said that Trisky had went up there, and he located—there was four, I think, four of these bulls up—he located them. He started bang, bang, bang, banging around, and he didn't kill any of them. [laughs] He just made a big mess of it. Old Hodges was sick in bed at the time, and they said...They came down, and they told old Hodge about it and they said old Hodge just turned his face to the wall and said, "[unintelligible]." But Trisky, I think, was gone shortly after that. That was that was all I knew about that deal. They did name a canyon up there for Trisky.

EK: Have you ever heard of Frank Treska?

CM: Treska?

EK: Frank Treska.

CM: No.

EK: He was supposed to be the first assistant manager here, and he had lived in that house down there were Cy lives.

CM: No, the first one that I knew was Byron Allen.

EK: Byron.

CM: Yeah, that was the first one I knew. When Hodges was out here, why, the buffalo range was just all for anybody...or nobody but somebody that was working here. I remember my dad and my sister and another girl came out here one day. Dad had made arrangements with Hodges to ride out on the Range. Hodges says, "Okay," but he said, "No white horses. No white horses." So they came out and they rode up on the Range and saw some buffalo, but they're about doing the only ones that I ever knew that were out on the range unless they were working here.

EK: Yes. I've heard a story that white horses was supposed to get chased faster than dark horses. I never quite believed it.

CM: Well, that's what Hodge told Dad, "No white horses."

EK: He rode an old black horse all the time.

CM: "No white horses." He told him, "No white horses."

[unintelligible background discussion; Kraft talks to another person about unrelated matter]

CM: Did I tell you about the first time they run the buffalo in the big round corral up there? Well, I guess the corral was full, and they milled. They just went round and round and round. I know there was one kid, Johnny Coleman (?)—he used to live here in the valley—he had a fit watching them. [laughs] He had a fit. They had to back him out there.

That evening, why, Rose told me, he says, "You send a man up to the corral before morning, and have him butcher out an old cow that they tramped to death out there after they milled." Knocked her down. So they sent this Fred Gonyer up, and we were working at the racks down here, sent him up, and it wasn't too long before he came back. I said, "It doesn't take you very long to skin out a buffalo."

"By god," he says, "when I skin them out, I want them dead."

I said, "Wasn't the old cow dead?"

"No." He said, "She's up staggering around the corral." [laughs]

EK: Were you there the time that they tried to count them the first time they put them through the pens?

CM: No, I wasn't there when they worked them through the pens. [unintelligible] down here. They must have had—when they started right down here—they must have had over 100 head in these pens down here. What were there in those pens? About ten acres?

EK: I think so, from what I've been able to find out.

CM: Part of it was down in the creek bottom—in the brush and the creek bottom. I was kind of—like the old guys—start [unintelligible] them up, they would just go right through this fence. It was just stuck up there. Didn't bother them a bit, as long as there was a pretty good bunch in there, why, they just move around, you know, move around. We shot at them. You get down to a small bunch, then they'd get kind of ringy and they'd run back and forth. Hell, we walked out there on all the time to shoot them. You're supposed to have—according to regulations—you were supposed to be a man on a horse that went out with the man that was going to do the shooting. But that got old hat, and we just walked out and shot them.

EK: You remember the time Ike shot that one below the slaughterhouse there, and you started out from the fence that—

CM: Yes, I do. Yes. I crawled over the fence and started down, and I got within about 50 feet of them. The old bull got up. Ike was [unintelligible] calves out. He was doing that, and then he glanced back and he saw the old bull up [unintelligible]. The old bull run down in the draw there and stood. Ike had his own rifle—heavy caliber rifle—and he wasted all his shots on him. He couldn't get him down. He had to come back up to the corrals and get 30-06 to finish him. He got him shot up a little bit. By god, they're hard to knock down. Hard to put down, and stay down. Old Ike, that was the only one, only time that he had never had any trouble with any.

EK: He shot that one from their horse when it was running. He said after he—

CM: Yes. [laughs] I didn't see that much of the action after he got the old bull going down, and I was going back to the fence.

EK: Was Rose a pretty good shot? Did he shoot a lot of the time?

CM: Yes, he shot quite a bit of the time. He shot quite a bit of the time. Ike did, I think, most of the shooting. When we were butchering down here, Ike was doing the shooting. Then one morning, I think we had got a buffalo, were working on it, and Rose come out and he said, "I'm taking Ike with me today. I'll send a man down the corrals to do the shooting for you." After a while, here comes a guy down from the corrals, and first name was Pat. What his last name was...he was a little Romanian that was here with Helebus (?), and Helebus' wife's folks. Oh god! When he came down, I said, "Pat, did you ever shoot anything like this?"

He said, "No. I haven't"

I said, "Did you ever do any shooting?"

He said, "I was in the army."

I said, "Pat, I don't think I'll let you shoot. You go on back up to the corral."

So I shot that day, but before that, when I came out to butcher, I told Frank, Mr. Rose. I said, "Mr. Rose, I came out here to butcher buffalo not shoot them."

He says, "You ain't got guts enough?"

I said, "Okay," let her go at that. [laughs] So, I shot buffalo that day. Next morning then [unintelligible], and Rose grinned, and he said, "I see you got guts enough to shoot a buffalo."

I said, "Yes. I was just a little bit leery of that man you sent down. I didn't want him to mess them up.

He said, "We'll take him and see this morning." One thing about Rose, why, you do it. You do it. If you don't do it, that was it. So Rose and Pat and I went out. Rose pointed out this bull that he wanted Pat to shoot, and Pat took a shot at him and the old bull just stood there and shook his head a little bit.

Rose says, "You can't shoot," reached over and grabbed the gun. "Go on back up the corral." [laughs]

EK: He's a one-shot man, that fellow? [laughs]

CM: That was funny.

EK: Yeah. I remember Rose telling me that he had to get Ike to come shoot, because he couldn't get somebody up there that was...had shot a bunch of them up or something.

CM: Well—

EK: I don't know who that was.

CM: Rose did a little extra shooting. I remember one time we were working up there, and Rose was down and the buffalos were in the corral, too. Bang, bang, bang.

Old Smith Riley says, "Take that man down an axe." He says, "Maybe he can kill him with an axe." [laughs]

EK: Well was Smith Riley here during most of the disposals?

CM: Most of that fall, he was here, yes.

EK: He was a paralytic.

CM: He was, yes. If he was in the office, why, Rose would be on the outside. If Rose was outside, why...Riley was in the office, why, Rose was outside. He had a sense of humor and all that. But one thing about him, you'd get him on a horse, and he'd stay there all day long out there on the Range. I remember one day, we were working on the racks up here, and he got off the horse and he started moving around and he fell down there. I ran over to help him get up. Jesus, he didn't like that at all. It made him mad.

EK: Frank Rose tells about him going from the office to the house for supper, and he'd fall down and he'd just leave him lay there and he'd go on, and pretty soon he'd show up.

CM: Well, he didn't want you to help. He was mad that day then yeah. I ran out there. I was going to help him up. [laughs]

EK: Do you recall any other men from Washington or any more or less, would you say, officials, or how many visitors...Was there a lot of guys in here checking on that stuff?

CM: I don't think so.

EK: Just very limited?

CM: Very limited. I know earlier, quite early, one time Mushbach [George E. Mushbach] was out and shot a couple up there. I helped butcher, but that was early in the fall. That was the only official it that I knew of that was around here. Smith Riley was around almost all the time, if not all the time.

EK: '25 and '26, though, was the years you figure you butchered, because they finished the slaughterhouse in '27.

CM: Yes, that was the years...Well, no, '24, and '25. '26 was the year that they shipped the elk, and they killed buffalo that year but I was not here that year. '24, and '25.

EK: Well, we'll get that straightened out. I yeah I think we can straighten our file up a little bit. The only thing we're going to be short on is the numbers. I mean any—

CM: —accurate.

EK: —accurate [unintelligible]

CM: Yes. That would be hard.

EK: When Cy came in '26, I don't just remember offhand what he told me. I could look it up here someplace. I'll just ask him again. But they sold the heads and hides pretty easily, apparently.

CM: They seemed to there. At first, they seemed to get rid of quite a few of them.

EK: How much did you say the head and hide...Do you remember?

CM: My recollection was 125 dollars for the head and scalp, and 50 dollars for the hide. They had one hide out here, that one buffalo, that I really would have liked to have had that hide. We had a bunch of...ten or eleven bulls down in this enclosure down here. Ike was doing the shooting. I don't know whether he'd been there all the time or not. I think Rose came in between. Anyway, we got down to four buffalo. Two buffalo—what Rose was keeping for the herd. The other two he wanted killed. So Ike came out that morning, why, I pointed out they two that he wanted. One was a big bull, and he was real, real, dark. Real dark-haired and shiny. He was pretty. I said, "That one and this one we want to keep out of the herd." The other two are the ones we wanted to get. As I say, small ones like that, they were on the run all the time, and they broke and they started running across the field and old Ike shot.

This one buffalo took an awful header, and Ike said, "I wouldn't have need to shot that one, that fall would have probably killed him. Then he said, "God, that's one that I'm not supposed to shoot!" [laughs] That was the herd bull that he shot. We got the other one right, anyway. We hung those two up down here, and it froze hard. Then it turned off real soft, real soft, and damned if it didn't sour. Then it turned off and froze again, and then Rose said skin them out. Well, that was the last that I remember that I was out here, but we got him down and got the hides started. Then we raised them back up again and tied them to the racks. Then we reversed our block and tackle and put the team on the hide, and pulled it off of that down to the head. Of course, we couldn't do anything with the head but cut the heads off, and we dragged the whole works down to creek so threw the heads into the creek so they'd thaw out. That was that. I was through then. They were about all through, anyway.

EK: Did you ever do that on regular buffalo? Did you ever pull the hide down with a team?

CM: That was the only ones we ever tried, no.

EK: They were sour?

CM: They were sour, and they froze. We just couldn't do it [unintelligible]. Old Jess Evans had a big black team. It just set them back to pull that hide down there. I didn't know what to do, but he just said skin them. [laughs]

EK: Did Jess drive a big gray team in here, too, earlier, or was it black?

CM: I think Jess had a big black team.

EK: Black team?

CM: Yes.

EK: He's living in Ronan.

CM: Jess?

EK: No, not Evans. No. Rude Ness, I think it was.

CM: Rudy Ness worked out here, yes. Rudy Ness worked out here. He worked all around. He did a lot of the shipping, too. I think he worked on that.

EK: Did you ever hear of any other incident Hodges might have butchered? Other than this time with Trisky?

CM: No, I never did hear any of him butchering any. I never did. As I said, this was kind of a closed operation out here—no visitors, nobody out here—when old Hodge was out here. It was for the buffalo, and that was it. I know that old Hodge just couldn't take it when it come to this killing program. He didn't want anything to do with it. That's one reason he quit.

EK: In later years...Did you work here then after 1926? Did you skin at different times?

CM: No. No—

EK: '24 and '25?

CM: '24, and '25. '26 I didn't...This Fred Gonyer—Fred is dead now—he was out here in '26, and he was working on the buffalo. Who else they had to help him, I don't know. I wasn't out here at all that that year.

EK: Did you ever have anything to do with that movie deal? That's when Rose left, was after that.

CM: Yes. No, I never did. No, I wasn't out here at all.

EK: You mentioned Henry Hendrickson working here. That was in '24 and '25?

CM: '24, and '25. Whether he worked after in '26, I don't know.

EK: Henry came here in 1915 into this valley. I was hoping to talk to Henry, but I've never interviewed him yet. I want to get up and get a hold of him. He was still working here in the '30s, because he was using his own personal car to follow these movie stars back and forth up the hill. He knows quite a bit about that movie situation, so I'm kind of anxious to talk to him and get a—

CM: Well, off the record; we had quite a butchering crew. I told Mr. Rose, I said, "Frank, really more men around here than we need. If you need any of them for the corral up there, it's all right."

Frank says, "Well I'll tell you," he says, "those corrals are appropriated money. I'll be careful of that, but I can take this butchering expense out of the sale of the buffalo. We might as well spend it here as on harvest and [unintelligible]. [laughs] Old Frank did a lot for these people out in Moiese. He did a hell of a lot for them.

EK: Frank never got any credit either.

CM: No he didn't. He didn't get the credit for it. He did a hell of a lot for those people. They were hard up, and he bought a lot of hay from them and he gave a lot of them work. I knew that none of them really liked Frank at all, but he did a lot of good for them.

EK: Do you know anything about that feeding program? Were they feeding in those two pens up there at the time you were butchering? Would they run in 500, 600 head there, and feed them in the spring?

CM: No, they had some hay stacks up there.

EK: They built the pens in '23—the two big pens.

CM: They had hay up there, but they used that after the butchering. They had used it. I was telling you about this old cow that got tramped down, and so I told Mr. Rose about it.

Mr. Smith Riley said, "Well, turn that old cow over to that hay stack and let her fatten up."

Later after, got Rose out of Riley's hearing, I said "Christ's sake," I said, "that old cow's so old, she's got no teeth. She can't eat that hay." I said, "She's hurt. The best thing to do with her is shoot her."

Rose says, "I'll tell you, if Mr. Riley asks my opinion I might argue with him, but when you do so, I'll do it."

Two days after that, I went up...After that, in the morning, I went up and I walked over, and I looked at the old cow. She was weaving around on her hindquarters. Next morning, I went up, why, she was down on her hindquarters. Pulling herself around on her front feet, so I went over and got the rifle and shot her. Hung her up, skinned her out. I told Rose that night, I said, "I killed that old cow up there. That was cruelty to animals." [laughs] That old poor bitch. [laughs] Ribs all caved in, and her hide was no good—great big moth-eaten spots on it. Her meat was all right for coyote bait, but that was all. She'd had a rough time.

EK: Do you remember any more of the names of the fellows that were helping you? That I might not have gotten?

CM: Well, let's see. There was Henry Hendrickson and—

EK: Rude Ness

CM: —Rude Ness, and then there was a Bill West. He isn't here anymore. He was helping down there. There was Fred Gonyer, and then this boy from Ronan. I just can't remember his name at all. There's—

EK: Ike and Neil.

CM: Ike Melton. Neil was here off and on. He didn't do much with the butchering, and... [pauses]

[Break in audio]

CM: I was always hated the buffalo, and I had an awful time getting through the gate there with my horse, because he'd be right up there at the gate.

EK: That was the buffalo called old Skim Milk?

CM: I think so. I think he was raised. That's what they said, that he was raised. Fred Gonyer and I came out, had a little Model T Ford—no top on it—and Skim Milk was lying in the road up there. I said to Fred, "Let's run into him." I goosed her up, and I ran right up to him.

Fred started out over the back of the seat. "Jesus," he said, "Oh no." Old Skim Milk never moved. I backed up and went around the front of him. [laughs] Didn't bother him any.

EK: You said then, they decided to butcher him?

CM: Yes, they decided to butcher him. Neil and Ike started to take him up there, got so far, and that was it. I think he put a gash in the flank of Neil's horse, pretty good sized one. He wasn't going to go.

EK: Do you have any other recollections of horses getting hurt, or men actually getting hooped by buffalo?

CM: No, no. One of the boys that worked here was old Tom Ethel from Ravalli. He worked out here. But no, as far as anybody getting hooped or hurt by the buffalo. Unless...if they were in small corrals, why, they're bad. But like out in these pens out here, I'll tell you, we walked right out there on foot, two of us, and we'd shoot our buffalo and kind of haze them away and go over and stick them. Then, old Jess would come out with the team and roll them on and pull them on in and hang them up. Then go out and get another one. They never knew no fight, and even, as I say, when there was a small bunch and they got ringy and would run, they never made any effort to come after you.

There was one time...and that was a thrill, that really was a thrill, down in this pen down here. One end of it was down in the creek bottom, and flat come up here and it dipped down a little bit and then down into the brush. Well, Rose had shot a buffalo, and it was probably 100, 150 feet from where it dropped down into the brush. The big bunch was back of us—south of us—in the upper end. There was quite a bunch there, they were up there. I had stuck this buffalo and sat down on him waiting for Jess to come out with the team, and Rose was standing behind me. Right down in front of us, out of the [unintelligible], an old bull, he comes walking up, up this little raise, walking along. I looked over my shoulder this way, and he looked over his shoulder the other way.

I didn't say anything, but Rose says, "Which is the closest?"

I said, "Neither one of them's close enough."

He says, "If it comes our way I'll make meat out of him." That old bull walked right up, walked right on by us. I was just going like that all the time, and you could just see his old staring eyes there. Right on by and right on up into the herd. He never blinked an eye. I thought with this dead buffalo there that would, that would kind of...Walked right by, and when it went by Rose says, "Geez, that's a relief, isn't it?" [laughs]

EK: You never had them going nuts like a cow does from blood?

CM: No not at all. Hell, when we first started to kill in there, why, I expected that you take these ranges cows, and they'd have been balling their heads off, but they did not. They did not. They didn't offer to bother the fence at all. There was a couple of elk in there one day. There wasn't no buffalo, a couple of elk wandered in there. So Rose and Smith Riley were riding, they came down. Rose said, "I wonder if these elk can jump that fence?" So they stirred them up and the elk jumped the fence very nicely. They just went over that fence just like nobody's business, but they had just wandered in there.

[unintelligible background noise and discussion]

CM: Ike Melton took a bunch from Pauline Coulee—I don't know, say, 50, 60 head—brought them all the way around to the gate on the enclosure on this side of the slaughterhouse. All by himself. He rode over and opened up the gate, there were buffalo on the inside. Buffalo on the inside, they all moved up within 100, 150 feet of the gate, and they just stood there. Ike's bunch was just standing there at the gate. Ike would just ride circle on them, way out far right circle on them, with an old cow on this side. Every time old Ike would go by, she'd make for Ike. He'd just dangle his rope like that. She'd turn around and go back in. Get around on the other side, and there's another old cow on that side and she'd make a break for him. But she never followed it through. She'd just go back in. Ike had lots of patience. He just took it easy and slow, and pretty soon they started trickling in—the whole works went in. I though they did pretty good on one man taking that bunch over there and putting them in there.

EK: Cy tells about teasing them a little, and getting them so that they would chase you then running from them later on for the movie and stuff.

CM: Oh yes. Well, you could go around...You take these old isolated bulls around and stir them up, why, they was ready to go to war.

EK: These were cows that he was talking about.

CM: Oh yes, cows. Well, the cows, they're pretty mean little devils.

EK: But a bull. I haven't got nerve enough to stand around when a bull goes on the [unintelligible]. I love cows, but—

CM: I only saw one. Rose was talking about him going through the fence, but I don't think that was before Ike was there. But one of them went through a woven wire fence up there by the corrals. He had an awful time, but he finally made her through. He just bore in, and he'd bore in and it'd throw him back, and he'd bore in again. He just kept going until he finally got through. That was the only one I ever saw that even bothered a fence at all.

EK: A few years ago, we were trying to cut the exhibition pasture herd back out to the Range, and one of the bulls instead of going through the gate, he hit the fence right beside the gate and he went clear through. Just took her right out.

CM: Ike was telling about one time they were...Up there at the corrals, they had a big round corral there, wire corral, and it just led right straight through here on up into the pasture. They had another pasture over here, and one over here. Ike and Rose had picked up these two bulls and were going to take them on up to the big pasture. Well, the gates up in the big pasture were open. This gate and this gate was open. This gate was shut, and this gate was shut. They run them up there, and the one bull went right on straight through. The other bull went in and

went in the gate on this side, turned around, crashed into the gate on the other side. Rose had ridden in, and he had his horse's head just inside the gate post. Ike had backed him up too, but he had his horse's head outside of the hind end of Rose's horse. So this bull hit the fence here...or hit the gate here, turned over and hit this gate here, and then came right straight back for Rose. Well, Rose was in a position he couldn't move. His horse was right up against that fence post. Ike said that Rose just reached over and slapped him across the face with his bull-whip, and the bull just turned around and went right on out.

EK: He carried a whip a lot, didn't he?

CM: Yeah. Ike said it was just like that. Rose just slapped him across the face there, and Rose was in a bad position. He couldn't turn his horse. He'd a...probably glancing blow if the bull would had hit him if he'd had his horse's head, but the position he was in, why, he'd have got the worse of it. He just slapped him.

When we first were butchering out in the open range there, one day he shot a bull and didn't kill him. We were riding horseback, and I rode back pick up Ike's horse...or Rose's horse, and he said, "Let my horse go. Let my horse go," he said, "go down. Head that buffalo off." So I rode down, and I rode by the old bull's nose two or three times, but I wasn't stopping them a bit and my horse didn't like them a bit either. Rose followed him up on foot and killed him. We had this second rack over there on the flat. We hauled him over there and hung him up.

That same day, or that same afternoon, it was getting long late in the afternoon, we got another one. By the time we got that one back, Rose had come back on into the office, by time we got that one over to the racks, it was dark. I happen to have a piece of miner's candle in my pocket that I carried when I went hunting, and I had that. We lit that, and we worked by that little candle light to get the bull up and hung up. We were a little late getting in.

Mr. Rose said, "How come you're so late?"

"Well," I said, "it took us quite a little to hang up that last buffalo."

"Well," he says, "You hung up that other buffalo in such and such a time. You should hang them all up." [laughs] I didn't say anything. I never argued with him.

EK: He was, generally though, pretty reasonable, wasn't he?

CM: He was...he was all right. With me, he was all right. He was fine with me. He never kicked or anything. We were working down here, and we used these big single trees with iron hooks on. We took the tug-hooks off and put our iron hooks on. Paul Streit was a blacksmith. He'd made up a bunch of them, but he didn't have enough. We ran out.

So this Fred Gonyer said, "What are we going to do? What are we going to do?"

I said, "We'll go up the blacksmith's shop and make us some."

We came up to the blacksmith's, and were making gabrels (?), and Rose come down, "What are you doing here? What are you doing here?"

I said, "We ran out of gabrels, and," I said, "you want us to hang up that buffalo, so we had to come out and make some."

"All right, all right." No, no, never any fuss with the Rose at all, at any time.

EK: He was a pretty good horseman, too, wasn't he?

CM: He was awful hard on a horse.

EK: Reckless?

CM: Reckless and hard on a horse. He started a horse from the bottom of a hill, he wanted the horse to be going as fast when he got to the top, as when he...Yes, he was hard on horses. I never rode with him much on the range, but that's what the boys told me, that he was a hard man on a horse. Rose was, he was reckless, yes. He didn't seem to have any fear at all. He just didn't seem to have any fear of anything at all.

EK: Well I sure enjoyed my visits with him. I spent two afternoons with him, and he—

CM: Yes, I liked Frank.

EK: If I go back sometime, would you like to go see him with me?

CM: Well, we'll see.

EK: I think he'd be tickled. He couldn't remember you. He had you and Heiney [Heiney Helgerson] mixed up.

CM: Well, the difference between me and Heiney was that Heiney talks all the time, and I never talk.

EK: Well that's true. [unintelligible] Of course, like I said, it was a long time ago, and he remembers the name and stuff, but he just couldn't quite place you. [unintelligible] out from Heiney, because I guess Heiney must have started right after you quit, or maybe he was working here when you were here?

CM: No, Heiney didn't work. Heiney started when they started killing in the slaughterhouse.

EK: Well, he butchered one year outside.

CM: He did?

EK: Yes, that must have been '26.

CM: Probably.

EK: Because he said they did 38, was all they did that year.

CM: Yeah. That was an awful year. I remember Fred talking about they had to skin out one buffalo, and they had so much mud, they had to take it down to the loading docks there. That it was hog-dressed and take it down there and skin it out there on the loading dock, because it was damn muddy out here they just couldn't.

EK: Yes, I guess they had a lot of mud and muck up there.

CM: Oh, that was an awful, awful year.

EK: Well, Charlie, you ready to go home?

CM: Anytime.

[Break in audio]

CM: Start over?

EK: Yes, why don't you just start?

CM: Well, Rose and I were out, we went out to the big pasture for buffalo. We were supposed to get about a three-year-old bull. I was carrying the gun, and Rose was riding horseback. We couldn't locate the bull we wanted. Mr. Rose said, "I'll ride up and stir them up." Up into the fog he goes. Of course, got into the fog, just lose sight of him entirely. Pretty soon, here the buffalo start coming down hell-bent for [unintelligible]. [laughs] Streaming right by me. I was looking for her rock to get behind or something. So he came riding down out of the fog, he says, "You're not having much luck. Give me the gun, and you take the horse."

I said, "Fine. That's a good trade!" [laughs] Jesus! He had those buffalo come down all around me. That was really thrilling. [laughs] That was a thrill.

EK: Yes, I can believe that. Babe and I, one time we went up there to the high country, and there's a small pen up there called the elk pens. So, I was riding a big gray stud-horse that was

here at that time. He was riding this little grey Appaloosa. We were both on real light-colored horses. This is one of those stories, you see, that deal with the white horses. The big heavy gate was off the hinges, and we couldn't get it back on. He said, "Well, I'll run up and run them off the hill and chase them down into the lane there, and you stay in the gate in case they get away. So he rides up into the fog, and it was all uphill just like you were saying, and pretty soon here he come down out of there an old cow right on his tail feathers. Just really going after him. So I get behind the gate, and when he'd go through the gate, well then I jumped this old stud-horse out in front of her. By golly she'd turn and go back. He did that three times, and every time he'd ride up into the fog, why, pretty soon I'd hear that old horse a-coming just as hard as he could go, and that cow would be right underneath him. She had a calf just hanging right with her, but for some reason or other, she'd turn from that other horse when he'd jump out in front of her. Then Cy and Grant came along, and four of us, we finally got them kicked off the hill there. Sure kind of spooky when they get to coming at you like that.

One time in the sheep pasture up there, why, we were running buffalo, and I thought I was really getting them going the right direction. Babe come along and he gives me hell, and he says, "Where are you going with them buffalo?"

I says, "Well, I'm taking them over the hill towards the slaughterhouse."

He says, "No you ain't." He says, "You're going just exactly the wrong direction." [laughs]

CM: [laughs]

[End of Interview]