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Interviewee: George Cameron

Interviewers: Judith Pressmar and Sarah Jaffe

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Sarah Jaffe: Today's date is September 17, 1997. This interview is being conducted by Sarah Jaffe and Judith Pressmar. We are in the home of George Cameron, west of Martinsdale. The purpose of this interview is to record stories, memories, and facts relative to the Forest Service and the forestland and central Montana before 1960. Mr. Cameron, could you tell us about your background and where you were born.

George Cameron: I was born in Harlowton, but I was raised basically here [Martinsdale]. I've been on this ranch, oh, I think I was about six years old when we moved here. So, that would've been about '45 or '46 when we moved here, and then I was here until I was 18, then I had a career with the Forest Service. I was at the Forest Service for almost 30 years, and then I came back here, after I retired.

SJ: Did you go to school here?

GC: I started grade school here in Martinsdale, took some correspondence course here at home, and then finished high school in White Sulphur Springs.

SJ: Where did your parents come from?

GC: Mom was from Harlo. My Dad was raised here on the home ranch up the road here about seven miles. So, this area right here. I think you interviewed my Mother yesterday, somebody did.

Judith Pressmar: Oh, yes, I did.

SJ: And your grandparents?

GC: Well, my grandfather on my dad's side came from Scotland, and my grandmother on that side came from Pennsylvania. Mom's folks, her mother was from Ohio, and her dad was from Oregon. He came here from Oregon and homesteaded. My grandmother on that side came from Ohio with her folks, and then they married. My grandfather came over from Scotland, I don't know just how old he was, nine-ten years old, and then he homesteaded up here when he was old enough. I pretty much lived right here. My Forest Service career was in White Sulphur.

SJ: Can you tell us your first contact with the national forest?

GC: Probably when I was old enough to remember, [laughs] because my dad worked for the Forest Service, and my uncle worked for the Forest Service. Oh, I don't know, I was just always around the Forest Service. Our telephone line between the two ranches was also Forest Service line, so we were on the Forest Service telephone line, and my grandmother took weather, they had a fire weather station up there at the ranch. I got my first check from the Forest Service when I was about, probably 10 years old, a fire check. I don't think they should have allowed that at the time but they did [laughs].

JP: Do you recall exactly what it was that you did in dampening that fire when you were ten?

GC: When I was 10? We'd been haying, and there was a lightning storm that went through and an old snag up on the hill, up in the mountains up there caught fire and my uncle was a per diem guard, so we took the fire tools and went up and put a line around it. Then our names went in with the fire time slips, and we got paid for it.

JP: So they didn't know you were ten?

GC: Oh, they did, but at that time it was two or three dollars I got off of it, I don't know, it wasn't very much. So you know, as far as the Forest Service, I was around it from the day I was born. It was just part of the family really, I guess, you might say.

SJ: Can you tell us about the allotments?

GC: I don't know just what you're looking for when you say allotments.

SJ: Well, I guess as far as grazing cattle and sheep on forest land, how that worked?

GC: Well, it was basically the same as it is now with the permits, I guess the big difference between then and now, and of course at the time I went to work for the Forest Service, was different because the Forest Service then, we handled all the drift fences, we did all the work on the drift fences, spring developments, we took salt out, basically about all the ranches did at that time, was put their cows on the forest. We took care of all the rest of the stuff, and that was even when I went to work for the Forest Service in the '50s, we did all that. Otherwise, there was a lot of sheep in the Little Belts at that time compared to what there is now. I think there was something like 19 or 20 bands, maybe, that went in the Little Belts. I know they went up Findon Lane and up that way by the ranch. There was sheep, seemed like, going through all spring.

SJ: How many sheep would make up a band?

GC: I think it was 1,100 was a full band, but I'm not a sheep man, so I really couldn't tell ya. But I think it was 1,100 to a full band, but I wouldn't swear to that. I know there was a lot of sheep

went up in the mountains at that time. As far as the forest permit at that time, when I was a kid, it was the same as the ranch, like I said, the Forest Service was kind of a part of the family.

SJ: Can you describe some of the lookouts or lookout points?

GC: Well, there was, up until then in later years, let's see there was Mt. High, Yogo, Porphyry, William's, Monument, Anderson Peak, Elephant Rock, were the lookouts in the Little Belts. Elephant Rock was the first one I think to go out. Anderson Peak over out of Niehart, they didn't man that in later years. Then Elephant Rock, they finally sold that. There was never a tower, it was just the cabin, and it wasn't on a tower. I know they hauled that out of there in '56. At one time there was lookouts in the Castles. Elk Peak had a lookout on it, Daisy Peak up here had a lookout, and there were a lot of lookouts before they went to the towers. They had some guy go around to all the higher points and he did a survey, calculating the heights of the trees and how much they were gonna grow, and which lookouts would be the best to keep, and those were the ones they kept. I'm trying to think when Mt. High, went...Anderson Peak and Yogo I think were the first lookouts they did away with and Mt. High, probably, about the same time. That would've been probably early '70s, late '60s. Monument, I don't know, it was still standing last I knew of. I know I blew William's lookout down in '75 or '76, that I blew that tower down. That was the last one. They'd done away with Yogo, and Mt. High, and Anderson Peak already. Porphyry, of course, they rebuilt that tower in '62, I think it was '62, and it's more of a visitor center, then a lookout.

JP: So, you say you blew it up? Dynamite?

GC: Well, what happened was the engineers had been condemning it for years, they said it was unsafe, and finally the ranger that was there at the time, Guy Walker, this was at White Sulphur, got sick of listening to the rabble rousing about it. He got a hold of me one day and asked me if I had any dynamite left over and I said I had some left, so he said, "Well go up and blow William's down." Well, I didn't really want to, I didn't want to do away with it...So, we went up, and it was kind of amusing, he went up, he wanted to see it go down, I think we had a case of dynamite. We got all ready to go and then we drilled some of the legs and got the powder and primer cord all wrap around and everything and touched it off, and it never even budged, never even shook. Then Guy said, "What happened?" I said, "Not a damn thing." So, I went and got another case of dynamite, and then we just blew two legs off that time. We managed to get it all down, and then when we cut it up to burn it there was absolutely no rot in any of it. There was nothing wrong with it at all. But it was gone anyway, so...Then it was two or three weeks later the supervisor, George Engler was there one day and him and I were talking about something, and I said something about "Sure hated to see William's Lookout go." He said, "What do you mean," and I said, "Walker blew it down." Boy, he was on the fight. He didn't know anything about it [laughs]. So, Guy was in a little trouble on that one.

SJ: Can you recall any dangerous, life threatening situations when you were with the Forest Service?

GC: Well I don't know, I guess probably some of the situations on fires at times that could have been life threatening I suppose. About the only time I remember for sure, is when we were burning slash one fall, and some kid they'd hired got carried away with the torch and got me surrounded by fire. There was some times, I suppose, when it probably could've been...I think that's probably why I'm on an oxygen tank now is some of the smoke breathed from the forest fires. Other than that, I don't recall any real life threatening situations.

JP: Well, how did you get out of that one, being surrounded by fire?

GC: Well, I managed to get out. I did have to go through some flame to get out. It was a situation where, you know, it could've been a lot worse. If I hadn't noticed what was going on, I probably could've got trapped pretty easily, but I did see what was happening and I managed to get out. I guess at the time there was a little adrenaline pumping. Yeah, it wasn't something you'd just shrugged off at the time that's for sure because I did have to go through flame to get out of there. That's about the only one I can really recall that was life threatening.

SJ: Do you remember seeing any Indian teepee rings, or Indian artifacts?

GC: Oh, yeah! I did a lot of work with the archeologists. I spent a lot of time with them. Yeah, there's teepee rings right around here. I picked up a lot of artifacts. Eagle Park out of White Sulphur was probably one of the best spots, I found a lot of points out there. I don't know, I worked a lot with the archeologists, like George Knight. This Gary McClain that was just killed up on the Flathead was a real good friend of mine. Gary and I worked together. George and I worked out on a travois trail up there out of White Sulphur between Allen Park and Island Park and Harley Park. There isn't any one spot that I can just tie into, but yeah, I spent a lot of time around them.

JP: Can you tell us more about the travois trail?

GC: I was working on a timber sale up there, and of course we had to have an archeological cultural review, and there was this old trail up through there that I'd used to get up there, and it always intrigued me because I knew it wasn't a Forest Service trail.

SJ: George, can you just trace it on the map as you're telling us about it, the travois trail. I have a red pen here for you to mark it.

GC: So, George Knight and I got to talking about it and then he came up and worked with me on it. We pretty well decided it had to have been a travois trail (tracing trail on map).

SJ: George is tracing the travois trail.

JP: What led you to believe it was a travois trail?

GC: Well this Allan Park, which it goes through, I found a couple points in there, and we found an awful lot of flakes, you know, that have been worked. It was obvious it'd been used a lot. We found the same thing in Island Park. Then there's a series of little parks that goes through out here, and Onion Park has stuff in it. Then you go through Onion Park, it goes right into Harley Park, and then from Harley Park to Belt Park is a short distance. We found artifacts in all of those parks, and this trail we found the age of it by boring the trees along the side of it. And, the fact that there was absolutely no trees growing in it, but there were trees growing along side of it. It wasn't a trail that had been cleared out, there was no sign of any clearing, you know, it wasn't somebody had cleared the trail. And the age of the trees and the way it was designed it just had all the appearances of being a travois trail. As far as actually proven, I don't know that it can ever be proven, but it was pretty well decided that that's what it was. Especially given the fact that these parks were all.... well, the farthest they would've had to travel through timber, solid timber, would probably been a mile. Otherwise, it was open country. It was the shortest route through the Little Belts, through open country. There was no other place in the Little Belts you could cross through without being in solid timber, so we just pretty well figured that's what it was.

JP: Do you have any recollections of any old mines?

GC: Oh, yeah, there's mines all over the place [laughs].

JP: Can you tell about some of the memorable old ones?

GC: I can't really think of anything spectacular around this country. Some, more out of Lincoln, out of Helena, but not right around here. It was you know, old diggings and the like.

JP: Any old cabins where somebody might have tried to stake a claim?

GC: Oh, yeah. There's lots of old cabins around. The Castles, there's a lot of them in there. There's old trappers cabins, like there's one up Calf Creek, up by White Sulphur. I don't know of cabins...there was the old Pierce cabin off of Daisy Peak up here. It burnt down. Most of them that I can think of would be around White Sulphur. I can't think of too many down around this country. That I can remember for sure (tracing). Here's the Pierce cabin. There's the cabins, like the ones the Forest Service burnt down, like Hoover Springs. Well, there's a Montana Power cabin in Ant Park, near Spur Park. I can't think of any others.

JP: In general, how was life in this area? What was it like for you growing up?

GC: Great! There weren't as many people. It was a whole different world then it is now. Of course, we didn't have power here until '47, '48, somewhere in there. The Forest Service, like I say, was more like a family. The station was here in Martinsdale at the time I went to work. Then there was the ranger and an assistant and the maintenance foreman, and that was about

it, other than the summer people like myself, and a couple of other guys. They had a fellow that served as a part time clerk and that was about it. The maintenance foreman had a pickup and the ranger had a truck, one-ton truck with stock rack, and that was it for vehicles.

JP: What was the ranger's name at that time?

GC: Glenn Kalatowski was the ranger at that time. I can't remember what the assistant's name was, his first name was Allen. He hadn't been gone from here too long and he died of a heart attack, and I can't remember his name. That would've been in '56. There was the station down here off the Teig's. They moved out from Martinsdale in '63. Even in White Sulpher, I was working there in '57, and it was the same there. There was a timber man and the ranger and an assistant that worked year round. The rest of us were ten month appointments. Everybody was out working. The office was closed up most of the time; in the summer time it was rarely if ever open. In the summer time we had a dispatcher there, but the office was closed far more than it was open. The people didn't come around. You dealt with the loggers, and the ranchers. As far as the tourists we rarely had anybody come in. Once in awhile somebody might stop in for a map. Like I said, we did a lot of the maintenance on the drift fences. Well, we did all the maintenance on the drift fences and the spring developments, we put salt out. So it was a whole different world then it is now. It isn't even the same.

JP: When you first joined the Forest Service was there as much moving around of personnel as there is now or did people stay in one place?

GC: Oh, I think it was about the same. Yeah, they moved pretty regular like Glenn came here I think in '52, or '53, maybe a little earlier than that, but he was here probably 8 to 10 years, which was about what most of them stayed. Johnny Forsman was here before that, and I think Johnny was probably here, well Johnny probably wasn't here that long. But I think George Rosky was the ranger before him, Johnny was probably here for five or six years. But they moved about the same as now. Of course, rangers at that time were GS7s.

JP: It sounds like you were fortunate then to be in the same place for the length of time that you were?

GC: Well of course I wasn't a graduate forester, so I worked my way up as a "Tech". Oh, I had chances to go but I didn't want to, and I was asked to go a few times too I think! [laughs]

JP: Well did you have more flexibility where you were?

GC: Well, I have no desire to go anywhere. I didn't want to move anywhere, so I just kind of worked my way up through the ranks.

SJ: You said it was great growing up here. What did you do for entertainment?

GC: Rode horses, worked cows. Entertainment to me, I guess is probably different than other people. Entertainment to me would be out working cows, or something like that.

SJ: Then go dancing one Saturday night?

GC: Oh, yeah in high school. But that was Harlo or White Sulphur. But, I would prefer to be out here, out in the hills somewhere, away from people.

SJ: Do you recall any hardships that your family might have suffered? Did you go through any bad times?

GC: Oh, I'm sure that other people would have considered it tough where you had to pack your water in, and wood, and no electricity. I didn't consider it a hardship. We basically raised all of our own food. We didn't buy hardly anything in town. Most of it we raised. We didn't eat beef we ate venison. I can't say that I ever suffered any hardship. I don't feel it was a hard ship. I've heard other people tell me about their hardships and listened to what they said and it wasn't as tough as I had it, so I could've considered it a hardship. I think it's a matter of a person's outlook. You look back, and being poor, or whatever you call it, can be a bad thing, or you can look back on it as the best experience in your life! That's how I feel. I don't think there's such a thing as being poor. There's such a thing if you can't get enough food to eat, yeah, that's a situation, but I mean as far as if you got food and shelter I don't think there's anyway they can be poor. Anything other than food and shelter to me, is extra.

JP: What is your growing season here? You said you grew all your own food.

GC: Probably the last hard frost can be anytime the middle of June, and we usually get one around the first of September. It isn't very long. Now last year we raised a lot of tomatoes. The corn crop wasn't any good at all. The year before we got a huge corn crop and cucumbers, and tomatoes. You can still raise peas, carrots, beans, spuds, your root vegetables, you know. Mom had a huge garden and she canned everything. The growing season isn't all that long.

That was another thing about the Forest Service, we camped out a lot, it wasn't having to be in town every night. We had the outposts like Calf Creek Station and Newlan Station up here, Whitetail Cabins, we stayed out there, we worked out of those buildings. The first few years if we were working the trail say in the Castles we were expected to be at the horse pasture getting the horses ready at 8:00, or where you started work. You went out there on your own time, and when you got back to the horse pasture, you left there at five. You went home on your own time too. It wasn't a matter of being at the ranger station at starting time, quitting time; it was the matter of being on the job. Then they got snippy about that and said well we could go out on our own time, we had to come back in on government time. Well, then they decided the insurance wasn't right if we got hurt on our time, so we couldn't go out until starting time. To some of us old timers that had been around, we didn't like that situation. The maintenance foreman there at White Sulphur was by the name of George Cochran, and for the

first two or three years I worked there, I worked with him, and we always figured on having the horse saddled by 8:00. That was the way we were, and that's what we wanted to do, but they came along said, "No you can't go out there," so that just meant that much less time we had out there to do our job. It seems like with all their rigamarole on that, plus all the safety precautions, they took the common sense away from everybody.

I remember in later years I worked the timber department and headed up a crew. One fellow I had working for me, filled out a CA1 accident report one evening because he tripped on a log, fell down and hurt his knee. It was our fault that he had done that, as far as he was concerned. I couldn't figure out how it was our fault, well, that log was there, and we expected him to walk through there and the log was there and he fell down. That's just exactly what has happened, they got to the point where every job should be totally safe, there shouldn't be nothing these people have to look out for, not even a log laying out there on the ground. That, to me, what has evolved doesn't make sense. That's one place where the Forest Service is so much different than it was when I first went to work. Of course, hard hats were unheard of.

JP: Were there many injuries despite these differences?

GC: I don't think there were any more than there is now. Not that I can recall. I don't recall anybody really getting dinged up bad. Once in a while, like it is now, somebody's going to get hurt.

SJ: Can you recall the names of any of your schoolteachers?

GC: Oh ya pretty near all of them. First grade was a lady by the name of Mrs. Peterson, and she whopped me every time she walked by! Of course the country schoolteachers at that time, that was in Martinsdale, there was probably only about 13, 14 kids all the way from the first to the eighth grade, all in two rooms. So one teacher taught from the first to the fourth, and then there was another one. And they didn't pull any punches then; if you got out of line they whopped ya! Then there was a Mrs. Turley and Mrs. Bishop, and then we took correspondence courses here at the ranch. Of course, mom taught us. At White Sulphur there was many teachers up there.

JP: Was there a school bus when you were going to school in Martinsdale?

GC: No, Mom took us in. We lived there in Martinsdale a couple winters in a little house. The first school bus was when we started going to White Sulphur. Then any of the kids that went to high school boarded in White Sulphur or Harlowton, boarded or didn't go

SJ: Your mother taught you at home?

GC: Yeah, the correspondence courses was with the University over there at Missoula. We sent our lessons in and they did the grading, then they sent them back. She made sure we did our schoolwork, and helped us.

JP: Home schooling is very popular now.

GC: Yeah, of course home schooling now, I think they do it basically with all of it, don't they? The University isn't involved is it?

JP: No, I live up in Kalispell and a lot of folks do that, mostly for religious reasons, but it's handled totally privately.

GC: At that time, we sent our lessons in to the University and they graded them over there and then they'd send back a sheet telling what they recommended, you know, if we were having trouble somewhere. So, once a week we chucked everything in an envelope and shipped in all our lessons and everything and they shipped it back. There were quite a few kids around here that I know of that did take correspondence courses sometime or another through the University. We're talking about around the early '40s, '50s it was a whole different world around here. Of course, telephones were the old hand crank, and of course that was all we had here up until the '60s.

JP: And party lines?

GC: Yeah, 26 people on one line. Then of course there was always those few that wanted to hear everything that went on, so the minute the phone rang pretty soon they'd have so many of them on there you couldn't hear anybody.

SJ: Do you recall when you first got running water?

GC: Yeah, it would have been after we got the electricity, awhile after that too. It was probably a year or so after we got electricity before we got running water. Until then we just had the old hand pump with a hand dug well. Pack it in and pack it out.

SJ: What improvements have you seen with the newer farm equipment? Is it better?

GC: Mine, not much! Most of mine dates back to the 1950s! So, I haven't seen much improvement on mine! [laughs]. Well, most of the haying equipment now, ranch equipment, has taken the manual work out of so much of it. Like haying where you got to a bale stacker, and swather and baler where you're not pitching hay, and handling it by hand. That's most of it and it's ten times more expensive then it used to be.

JP: Do you think that's better?

GC: Well, that seems to be the main thing in life anymore, is money. If you can't hang a price tag on it there isn't no value to it, you know.

JP: But there were a lot more people working back then, I guess?

GC: Yeah, a lot more people working, and I think appreciating life a lot better. I really feel that way. Yeah, there's a lot of difference. Of course like I say my machinery does date pretty close back to that. I still got an old 1960 Chevy pickup, and the swather, I think, was made in the '60s, and a couple of tractors that were big back into the '40s, and there still running and I'm still using them. They still do what they were intended to do, and they do it just about as efficiently and well as the new ones.

SJ: Where did most of the labor come from? Was it local or outsiders?

GC: Well before the war, there was a lot of laborers around here, but there was a lot of manual labor needed. They were pitching hay to feed in the wintertime and all of that to take care of the horses, it took a lot of people. I would classify them as local people, because they were fellows that were around here for years and years. During the war, of course, there was a shortage of manpower. I remember we had a couple crews of Mexicans here. The government was getting Mexicans to come up and work. At least one year, maybe two years, we had a crew of Mexicans here during haying season.

After the war all these guys got out of the Service and was drifting around the country. A lot of them were from back east. They came out here looking for work. A lot of those fellows had been shot up, they had a lot of problems. People don't realize now how bad off those folks were to come out of that Second World War. A lot of those guys drank heavy. They just kind of drifted around, didn't have any purpose in life. I remember one fellow in particular, he was about 21 when he came here. He'd been in the middle of the Pacific as an aircraft gunner on a landing craft, and they went in on an island there somewhere in South Pacific, he told me which one, I don't remember. There wasn't suppose to be too many Japanese there and as it turned out they [Japanese] ambushed them. Just as they hit the beach the Japanese cut loose and he got shot up pretty bad. He lost most of one hand, all but his thumb and two fingers. He laid in a hospital in Australia for six months or something. He'd just got out of the Service when he came to work for us. Real nice young fellow, he was from Detroit. He finished healing up here, and worked for us for a couple years. At the time he wasn't drinking, well then he got started drinking. He got pretty bad, and then he kind of straightened out a little bit. He left here once and he was gonna go back and see his folks, he hadn't seen them since he went to the Service. We didn't see him for a long time, and it was probably four or five years later, when he showed up here in Martinsdale, and he was drinking heavy, a total alcoholic, and that's all he ever was from that day on. Finally, he kind of disappeared; I hadn't heard anything about him for a long time, and here last year, Mom happened to see the paper where he died in a rest home over at Lewistown. But that's the way some of them fellows went. That's where a lot of the laborers came from then after the war, was those fellows that were drifting around. Then when that

ended, we kind of lost a need for those fellows, you know. We always had, in the summer time, three or four hired men here. Now, I don't need them. The machinery you've got now, it's a one-man operation.

JP: So, you do it all yourself?

GC: Yeah. You needed guys then when you were putting hay up by hand. You needed a lot of hands to get it up. Bair Company used to hire, I don't know how many men, I'll bet they had 20 men, but then they also probably had at one time 20 teams of horses too, where they were doing all their work with horses. They probably had more teams than that, because they may have had 10 or 15 mowing machines going at a time and then the rakes, so it took a lot of men to run an operation like that. The more guys you got, then the more you had to have to a point, because you got to feed them, you got to have somebody butchering all the times, you got to have the cooks, you got to have the chore boys, you got to have all of that.

JP: Would they house them in a bunkhouse?

GC: Yeah, we had a bunkhouse. Every ranch pretty much had a bunkhouse. Of course, those outfits had a bunkhouse, and a cookhouse where their hired hands were fed. Here, they ate with us, but they had the bunkhouse they stayed in.

JP: Who would cook for them?

GC: Mom. Yeah, it'd be a hot 90-degree summer day and old wood cook stove, and five, six men to cook for where you're baking all your own bread, and taking care of the garden, you had chickens to take care of, and cows to milk. It'd keep you busy.

JP: Yeah, you couldn't get into too much trouble [laughs]. Dave was asking about horses, and whether there were any horse thieves around the country.

GC: Yeah, but I couldn't name any of them. At one time dad had a fair bunch of horses up at the home ranch, and I remember one year some of them disappeared, so yeah, there was a few around. There were a lot of horses in the country, of course a lot of draft horses and workhorses, which there isn't now. You very rarely see anybody with workhorses anymore.

JP: What breed would they use?

GC: There was about everything around here, Belgium, Persian, Clydesdale. Belgium and Persian were probably the most common, as far as I can remember.

JP: No one would be the particular breed of choice?

GC: Not that I know of, no. It seems more and more people are getting away from the horses, going to four-wheelers and motorcycles. I prefer the horse. The problem here lately, the horses we had died on us. We lost four or five here in the last three or four years.

SJ: What is the farthest distance you would ride on a horse?

GC: Our summer range was about 10 miles north of here. I used to ride up there. That's probably about the farthest I rode. You were out there spending the day checking the cows and ride back; it was a pretty good days ride.

JP: What about saddle horses? What breed would have been favored?

GC: Most saddle horses I knew of were Heinz variety. Morgan's, there were Morgan's around, and the old Quarter horse is about it. I remember dad had an American Saddler, but he was kind of worthless. There were some of them around. Most of ours was basically the Heinz variety. Quarter horse, Morgan's.

SJ: Can you think of any more forest stories to tell us?

GC: I've got all kind of them! The Elephant Rock lookout, I said, they'd torn it down in '56, it was just a cabin, it wasn't on legs it was just on little cement pillars, probably four feet high. I know they spent a month or so getting it loaded on a truck up there and getting it off the mountain. They were goanna take it down to Ashland down in Custer. It was a month, they had it contracted out, and he finally got it loaded and got it hauled off of there. Got down to Billings, and forgot to measure it, and went under an underpass down there, and that was it!

JP: Did they salvage any of it?

GC: No, the insurance had to build a new one I guess.

JP: That must have been embarrassing!

GC: Yeah. Well let's see, we were talking about that first check when I was 10 years old. In '53 it would have been, I was in high school, I would have been 15, 16 years old and that hunting season it was real dry, and a lot fires started. The hunters started the fires, up here in Higgens Park country in Dutch Springs. Johnny Foresman was the ranger there, like I say, we were still awful close to the Forest Service, so they called Dad and asked him he could come along on one of those fires. So he grabbed my brother and I and took the jeep and went down to the station, loaded up the sleeping bags and supplies, and headed up there. I was on the fires then for, oh, a couple weeks, that I was out of school. I would've been 16, because we got paid for that a pretty good check. Then the ranger there, he's retired now so they couldn't do anything against him.

Then was another time after that we were out on fires, because the radio system, they just started using radios, and they were using the old World War II surplus radios, they were pretty well worthless.

JP: This was in the early '50s you are talking about?

GC: Yeah. I know we were up in Ant Park, that was another time we went out looking for fires with them. The lookout that was on Mt. High, Blaine Tennis was lookout then, that was when he was still in college. He eventually retired as ranger here in Harlo. Of course, Dad wasn't Forest Service, but he was there and had been Forest Service. For some reason, he had to use one of these radios for something, and I remember Blaine called him and told him he was not using proper radio technique. I don't think Blaine probably ever called anybody and told them that again, because the words that came back over the radio were unrepeatable.

Those old radios, like I said, were pretty well worthless. I remember one time we could talk to California pretty good on them, but you couldn't talk around here very good. George Cochran and I were up there out of White Sulphur; we were on a ridge, maybe a mile and a half from William's Lookout, we could see him right over there, and we were suppose to check in every so often. We couldn't talk to him at all, we couldn't get him on the radio, but we were talking to California. That's the way those radios worked, they weren't of much account. That next fall, another fellow and I were working up in Adams Creek country and we had about a foot of snow, it was getting down around 10 below zero, it was in November, and we had a jeep pickup with a radio in it. We'd sit there at noon and talk to a lookout down in Georgia, Snake Tower out of Athens, Georgia. We used to every noon hour visit with him. Then of course there was very few radios around, you know those old junkers that we used, but normally when you went out on a fire at that time, you took your fire pack and you headed out and if it got too big for you to handle you hoped they sent somebody else in, but you didn't have any communication. You didn't have a radio with you just had your equipment and that was it.

JP: Would you stay out on the fire line, or would you come back?

GC: Yeah, we'd stay there. They had just started using patrol planes at that time when I first went to work. They only had them when they needed them.

JP: When did you get new radios?

GC: The first ones were probably around '61 or '62; I think is when we got the first, better radios. These were the old long wave radios. Maybe we went to the short wave then in the '60s. We still had that big long whip antenna in '59 and '60. Then they got us on different frequencies, so we weren't talking to California. There were times when it really fouled things up. California would have a fire with fire traffic, and there'd be a fire here with fire traffic, and we (firefighters) would be on top not knowing who we were talking to. We still had the

telephone system, like Whitetail Cabins up here; we still had the telephone there when I first worked, because I stayed the summer there. We didn't have a radio, but we had telephones.

SJ: Can you explain the process from the time you were notified about a fire until you got to the fire? How did that work?

GC: Basically, the lookout would call in a location. Then if they sent you out, you'd get your fire pack, they give you the location, the closest place to it that you can get and you go out there and jump in a pickup and head out, and hope you find it. If you didn't, you spent your time out there until you did, or if you couldn't find it then you came back in. You didn't have a radio to call back in with, you just went out and looked.

JP: How did you communicate with each other when you were actually fighting the fire if the radios didn't work close by?

GC: Yelling. If you weren't yelling you didn't communicate! That's about what it boiled down to! Which, in some ways, probably made they guys on the fire line a lot safer. You wouldn't rely on somebody hollering at you on the radio. I remember a couple of those fires the fall of '53 when they put me on snag lookout, where I would sit and watch snags in case one fell and I could let out the warning and tell everybody that there was snags coming down. Which, I would hope they still do in certain circumstances.

SJ: What kind of gear would you wear?

GC: Fire packs at that time had a canvas tarp that was big enough you could roll up in it and sleep if you had to, say, seven feet long and maybe five feet wide. You folded that up, and in that was the rations, which were totally different than they are now. You had three packs of rations, three meals. Then you had your file, ax stone, map, compass, and first aid kit. I think that was about all that was put in there.

JP: How about water?

GC: Yeah, we had a canteen on there. Then you rolled that all up, and that went on a backpack, a wooden frame was all it was with pack straps. Then you had your shovel, puluski, and your canteen that fit on the back of that, and you tied it all together. The handles of the shovels and pulaski's stuck straight up and you put that pack on your back. That's what we had. If you got stuck out over night, then you curled up in that tarp. Sleeping bags at that time were too heavy, well, you couldn't pack them.

JP: How much would that have weighed?

GC: I suppose, all total, maybe 20 pounds. It wasn't all that heavy. The rations at that time consisted of surplus military C rations. Had a can of beef stew, or spaghetti and meatballs, or

macaroni and cheese, and then you had a can of crackers, and a can of fruitcake, and a couple candy bars, or something like that. Then some of those earlier ones had cigarettes. Then they went to the Forest Service rations, which were basically the same. I don't know what they eat now, freeze-dried stuff I think. There was no hesitation to drink water out of the creeks at that time. There's no way you'd get me to drink this water now. In fact, I even hesitate in the hills, unless I know I'm up at the head end of the creek, then I don't hesitate, but down below where there's human activity, I won't drink. The animals don't bother me at all, but if there's any human activity I won't drink it.

SJ: What other pollutants would there possibly be in the water, other than human?

GC: As far as I'm concerned, the animals don't pollute it, but there's a lot of people here who seem to think they do. They've been walking around in it for years. Well, I take that back, anymore with all the diseases and all the stuff there pouring into the cows through vaccinations, yeah, I'd have a little hesitation. Even my cows, I don't like to be vaccinating them as much as I do, but you have no choice. You either do that, or you're gonna lose your cows. Some of that could add to the pollutant, there's no question about that. The pesticides, and herbicides that they're spraying around, but as far as the animals themselves, it's kind of like them fussing over the dead buffalo in the Yellowstone River...so, there's a dead buffalo in the Yellowstone River, you know. I don't think anybody's drinking out of the Yellowstone without purifying it first. If they are, they shouldn't be.

SJ: Do you think there are people deliberately polluting the water?

GC: I don't think so.

JP: In roaming around this area, did you ever see any signs of early logging, or sawmills?

GC: There were little mills operating when I first went to work. There were portable mills operating. Theo Burns had a portable mill up here in Cooper Creek in the Castles. Armos Rada, White Sulphur, Silver Tip, he had portable mills and he moved around. Emmett Roach, White Sulphur, he had nine or ten of them at one time that he was moving around the hills. Emmett, I don't think he was ever on Forest Service. But Silver Tip, Armos Rada, was on Forest Service. He had one on Mill Creek for a while. Theo Burns, this man was generally sawing Forest Service, but he quit logging in the late '50s. Armos quit sometime in the '60s. Then there was a fellow by the name of Daniels from North Carolina that had a couple mills around here for a while. Yeah, they were still operating up into the late '60s.

JP: That would have been mostly for local use?

GC: Yeah. And then there was a little mill up there on White Sulphur, up towards Forest Green. O'Dell was their name. They had a little mill there for years and years and years. They stayed in that one place, and cut a little bit of timber, and hauled the lumber into the mill and sell to the

mill. They kind of eked out a living. But the Forest Service kind of got down on the little mills and run them out.

JP: Thinking of logs, can you tell us something about the history of this house?

GC: This house? This is made up of two homestead buildings. They were on up country up north here. I helped my brother tear this one down, and then he rebuilt it here. The bedroom was another one that was moved down. This log building right over there is the original homestead building on this place (pointing). That's why it's still there, it's pretty well gone. These logs would have come from up here. These logs and that one over there, I would suspect came from the Castles. My granddad had a mill up north with a steam engine. The railroad cut a lot of ties up there, in fact, there's a place up there you'll still find some of those old logs, with the U.S. (Forest Service) stamp on them.

Up out of White Sulphur, there's a series of log dams in Sheep Creek. There pretty well all gone now. That was back in the 1880s, I think 1890s. I'd always wanted somebody to do something about them, preserving them, or get something done, and George and I wrote his masters thesis on them, and took pictures of them and wrote it all up. Which, I'm glad he did so it did get documented. That one dam, they're what they call splash dams, they're real unique. Most of the splash damns were built back in Michigan, in that country where they used them. The one up there is the longest that has ever been recorded.

JP: How long would that be?

GC: Seven hundred and some feet. George and I did a lot of work on that. I had a copy of his master thesis, and I left ended up leaving it at the Forest Service in White Sulphur.

JP: You say George?

GC: George Knight. He's the archeologist with the Forest Service somewhere out in Oregon right now. I don't know just where he's at out there. I still have got his pictures here, so someday I suppose he'll be back. He did put all that down, so there's a record of it. I'm really glad to see it. It's pretty fantastic what they'd done. There was an outfit, Montana something...I can't think what they called that, but they were gonna log that whole country up there. I think the way these dams work, they fill them with water and float the logs, and then they'd break that dam loose, trip the gate, and go down with that high water and take the logs down in a series of dams and out into the Smith River and down into the Missouri, and down the Missouri into Great Falls. I think two runs they made, and they lost so many logs that they had to give it up. When they left, they sent word back up to the crews in the hills that they were done. I don't think they were gonna get paid. I remember working up there laying timber sales out where I would find saws and pieces of harness and stuff that they had left lay. There were decks of logs up there that they'd decked. They had log chutes where they'd slip them off the top of those hills into the creek. It was quite interesting.

JP: They couldn't skid them out or anything else?

GC: They skidded a lot of them. That was about all we had to go by. His master thesis describes the whole works. He dug everything he could out of the news papers.

SJ: Can you think of one more story?

GC: Let me think here a minute. I can think of some my Dad told me. My Mother probably told you some of his stories. The CCC was in operation when he was working. He worked for the Forest Service, but they used to detail these CCC crews to the Forest Service, and he would supervise them in regard to the work they were doing for him, but they were still under the CCC supervision of the Lieutenant or whatever it was. That one year, they were at Newlan Station there out of White Sulphur at the tent camp all that winter. In the tent camp it got down to 40 below zero. They were building horse pasture fence up at Four Mile, which was about a good 20 some miles away. I know he said it was a bad snow year, and of course the vehicles at that time, they didn't have four wheel drive. They'd head out in the morning, he said they'd get to the job and it was time to turn around and go back. Day after day they'd fight that snow, and get up there and couldn't work so they'd go back, day after day. They had to keep the CCC boys doing something, so they kept them doing that.

JP: Was that typically what they'd have them do?

GC: That and roadwork, they built a lot of roads. They were building a road, what they called a Divide Road from King's Hill west to Williams's Mountain, at the time the CCC closed out up here. That road, well, it's gone now, but it was a road up to a point, and then there was about another mile where they'd cleared all the stumps and got ready for the road, and then for another half a mile there was stumps, and then for another half a mile there was deck logs, and then another half a mile there was downed trees. They were just left right there. When I went to work there in White Sulphur, the old CCC camp over at Belt Creek was still there. The barracks, the cook shack, and the whole works was still there.

JP: Those were permanent structures, not just tent camps?

GC: Yeah I guess you could call them a permanent structure, in a sense. I guess you could call them permanent. They were made out of four by eight sections that they bolted together. They fit together with a pipe ring type thing so that when they put up a building you just bolted them all together. The roof and everything was made that way, so that they could be taken down and moved. I assume the one at Belt Creek, some of it was made that way I know, because the old Calf Creek Station down there out of White Sulphur was made with those. Then in later years they went in and finished it all on the inside, and put sheet rock up, so you'd never know it now. When I first went to work there that cabin was made out of those sections and they were all bolted together and that was it.

JP: No insulation or anything?

GC: Oh, no, there was no insulation. The floor was just old rough boards; in fact, we stuck a pole up in the middle to hold the roof from falling in. We had a couple of steel cots in there, and a table, which was a combination cupboard table. There was a lot of those, the front of the cupboard folded down to make your table. The wood stove was a cook stove, and that was it. We had a little box with a screen in it set out in the trees if you wanted to keep something cool, or set it in the spring. Of course, the lookouts at that time had no refrigeration. At Williams (lookout), it was about a mile to water there, so you got so could do a lot with a gallon of water.

I can tell you that one story about that lookout. This one fellow that worked there, Frank Briggs was his name, and we put Frank down in the lookout that summer, he was a character anyway, and that fall he stayed up there, it was a dry fall. It was into October, he was still up there, and it snowed about four inches, so I went down to get him. It was a long ways down there at that time. It took a better part of the day to get down there and get up to the tower. You could drive to it in a jeep pickup. Grouse season was open, and at that time we carried our rifles with us, and on the way up there I'd shot a couple grouse. I figured we have them for supper, because it was gonna be supper time by the time I got up there the way things were going. It was just getting dark and I pulled up and there were no lights in the tower. I thought that was odd, because it was dusk, so I figured he'd have a lantern lit. I started up to the tower, and no footprints in the snow at all, about three inches of fresh snow. Well, I got concerned then. I got up and went in the tower, and nobody was there. The door was open. It was cold in there. No fire, no nothing. I figured he had fell off the tower somewhere. About that time I heard this rattling around up on the roof. Well, to get up on those lookouts, the shutters on those windows opened out, and when they opened out they propped out, so the only place you could get up was in the corner where there was no shutters. You could crawl up there to get up. About that time he comes straddling down off the roof, and there was this three inches of fresh snow and on the catwalk and he came in. I'm thinking what the hell's he doing up there. Well, his chimney had blown down, and he was up there putting his stovepipe back up. It was dark and three inches of fresh snow, crawling around on top of that lookout. It's scary enough crawling around up there in broad daylight [laughs].

I guess my favorite part of the later years of the Forest Service was the flying, which I got to do in air patrol. Of course, I was a pilot myself, so I enjoyed flying. And the last summer of '85 we had a lot of fires. I got to spend a lot of time in the air patrol, and that was a good way to end my career.

JP: When did they start using planes?

GC: Late '50s, well say mid-'50s. When I first went to work, you could get an air patrol, but you had to call for it. Retardant was just coming into play then, it was just starting to be used.

JP: Were you flying a plane that was dropping retardant?

GC: No. Just a patrol plane looking for smoke. I was a lookout, Tuk Parret was the pilot.

JP: So, there would have been two people going up in the planes?

GC: Yeah, the pilot and one of the Forest Service people. They started using helicopters in the mid '60s. The first helicopters I was around would of been in '60 or '61 out in Idaho, in the Selway Bitterroot Wilderness. We had a fire there, and that was the first helicopter I was around on fires. I remember one time, George Cochran and I had been working trails in the Castles, and we were coming out one evening, and we were laughing about someday they'd have a helicopter they'd do that with, and to us that was a joke then. Isn't now.

Around the '60s was when they first started using Indian crews, because it was a different world then. We had a fire up here in Higgins Park, and we had a crew of Crow in there, and a crew of Blackfeet came in. We made the mistake of putting them on the same line together. We found out that wouldn't work. Today I don't think it would make any difference, but, boy, at that time it did, because they hadn't been out that much together. They hadn't worked on fires. It was something new.

On fire duty at that time, meals were cooked right there. You had the stoves, you got a cook in there, the meat, all that stuff was brought in fresh, and you did all the cooking right there. Now they heat it up in the garbage can in a plastic bag. You didn't have showers, you didn't have a port-a-potty, and you didn't have all that stuff. I don't recall ever being in a fire camp where anybody got sick from the food. I guess it happened, but I don't recall. I never saw it. If you had a good camp boss there's no way it could happen, because he would have a handle on that. He would be making sure that stuff was taken care of. You didn't have refrigeration, but he would be making sure that there wasn't a chance for any of that to happen. I understand where they couldn't afford it if it did happen.

I was on a fire over in Idaho one year, Sundance fire at Trapper Peak, and I had a crew from Belknap or Rocky Boy and they also had a crew from down in New Mexico somewhere, at the same time, in the same fire camp. Of course they were talking Spanish. Well, we were out doing night duty, and there wasn't much to do but just patrol the line. We weren't supposed to do anything, just patrol the lines. Well, these characters that I was with, got to giving this other crew, they were talking on the radio, and they were talking in Spanish, this crew of mine got to harassing them, joking them and giving them a bad time. I told them, "You better watch out, you're gonna get in trouble." Well, they kept it up. Finally, one morning we hit camp about the same time that crew had hit the breakfast line, and we just come awfully close having a knife fight. I mean it got dirty! So they decided they'd better just cool it.

I remember when we got into camp, and of course these were big fires, these were 100,000-acre fires, so it was out of proportion as far as anybody knowing anybody. This crew of mine

they decided they were goanna fix this up right away, so they managed to get one of their fellows on the camp crew. Well of course we were going out after supper, supper was our breakfast and then we were out on the line. Well, every night when we'd head out and as we go through the line to eat there would be this big container, it was an insulated metal container, sitting there at the end of the line, and two of my crew would grab it, and away they'd go with it. Well, it would be chuck full of fried chicken and, you name it, spuds and gravy, and that fellow would fix us up every night. He'd load that thing up, and they'd just casually pick it up, and away we'd go.

JP: So you didn't go hungry.

GC: Boy, we didn't on that fire! We had a fine time.

JP: This sure hasn't been a good fire season.

GC: No, I saw a lot of these in my years. Boy, the fire boys would cry the blues. Of course, at that time there was no sections, everybody was in it together. Those first few years I worked, I worked in everything. I worked in timber, I worked in range, I worked in road maintenance, you name it, and it was more like a big happy family. You did what needed to be done, and the ranger is out there with you. That one year we had probably, I suppose 800, 900 acres of slash piles to burn that one fall, and there was myself, the ranger, an assistant, and then there was a maintenance foreman, and the fellow who was working with him, and another assistant. There were five or six of us. We'd spend the day doing our normal jobs, and then come 5:00 or 6:00 the ranger and everybody who was in the office would head out, and we'd all meet out there in the field. We'd burn piles until about midnight. Every night. Then we'd head to town. We'd stop at one of the restaurants, usually Newlan Creek, on the way to town and have steaks. We did that for probably two or three weeks until we got all that stuff taken care of. The ranger and everybody was out there, he was right alongside of ya.

JP: That's what we've heard a lot of people say that the rangers used to be a lot more involved with the ranchers, and in the community.

GC: Oh, yeah, the ranger there in White Sulphur when I first went up there, Walt Dale (?), it was rare you ever saw Walt in that office. He was out all the time. If there was any paper work that needed to be done, that was detailed to the assistant. Like I say, we just locked the station up. The first clerk they had in White Sulphur was probably about the early '60s. There was nobody there, except in the summer time when we had a dispatcher. That particular ranger just come out and worked with us. He went out with me lots of times and worked on timber sales and stuff. If I needed help, and nobody else was available, he'd be there, because the job needed to be done.

JP: These days are the children of the people who own the ranches around here, are they pretty much staying here and continuing that?

GC: Yeah, I think so. Of course, you run into a situation now, so many of these places, that there's no way that it could handle, maybe there's three kids in the family, there's only room for one. It's either that, or they're so big that, I guess, the whole family could handle it. The small ranchers, there's a lot of them around, but the way things are any more you couldn't really support too awful many people on one of them. This valley right here, Bair Company, it's a big outfit, but there's quite a few small ones up and down here. I don't know, Bair Company, they probably got 60, 70,000 acres. Plus, they lease a lot of state lands.

JP: That's a corporation though, isn't it?

GC: Yeah, since Alberta died, I suppose it is, but I know it's a trust fund type thing. There are some of the smaller ones that have wound up with people from California owning them. You're from around Kalispell?

JP: Yeah, and one of the reasons I ask is I know a lot of the places, not the very large places, but the sort of medium size places or smaller places, where folks die and you're right, if there's several children, it's not enough to make a living for all of them, so then the place gets sold and broken up.

GC: A good friend that worked for the Forest Service, he's up in Kalispell. Larry O'Connell. The O'Connell's have a little farm there out of Kalispell. Larry was working at White Sulphur with me. In fact, he had a heart attack in my office one morning. Wound up with about four bypasses.

Well, I could probably come up with a lot of other stories if I think about them awhile.

SJ: We appreciate what you've told us. It's been illuminating!

JP: We'll think of lots more questions when we get back.

SJ: You've given us a lot of rural history.

GC: You asked me about the teepee rings. I guess I feel that the Forest Service has really neglected that part of the resources. I consider that a resource. To me they've really neglected it. The archeologists have done what they can do, but unless it's changed drastically, and I don't think it has, there's no backing from the higher ups to do any of this. I know of a lot of places around, like this travois trail. I notice you haven't gone out there with Kelly. I've talked to Kelly, and she knows about it, in fact, I was suppose to map it out for her, and never did.

JP: She said, "Now you make sure you get him to trace it on the map!"

GC: To me that needs a lot more work on it. It needs somebody to go up there and spend a lot more time than George Knight and I did. Two things against us there. Number one, that was not my job. Any time I spent there was taking away from what I suppose to be doing. George Knight, it wasn't possible for him to spend much more time on it either, because he didn't have any justification for it. He was supposed to do a cultural review of this timber sale, and they allow him a couple of days to do it in. Well, what if he finds something like that, where's he gonna get his time to spend to really dig into it?

I remember I was working for the Helena [National Forest] doing some work for them over on the timber sale out of Lincoln, and they'd gotten into a hassle with the engineers on this, the archeologist over there had. The engineers had surveyed a road in there, and they'd went right through these old cabins at this old mining sight. This was kind of a unique area, supposedly these cabins had been built by Chinamen who were doing this mining, and they'd built these little cabins, and so they got in a hassle with the engineers over it, and the engineers said, "Well, that's it, that's the way the road has to go," so they called me to see what I thought about it. I went up there, and here's these little cabins, and I'd seen them before, I knew they were there, but I hadn't spent that much time with them. Well, there's one there about the size of this kitchen, 15 x 15, of course they're all falling down, there's just maybe four feet of the logs left on each side. In the corner was this fireplace and it had two huge rocks standing up, and the mantle over the top of that was a rock probably five feet square. How they ever got it up there, I don't know. And here's the engineers flying right through that building. Well, there was no need for that road to be there. I easily moved it away from those buildings to where it didn't hurt a thing. It served the same purpose. It didn't distract the logging. But they were gonna fight on it, they weren't gonna back down.

That's the thing that really bothers me. Somebody needs to, I don't know if they need archeology to get somebody in the supervisor capacity, or something, that has a little feeling for this and put a stop to some of this. I've sat in timber meetings where they'd deliberately try to figure out ways to, what would you say, obliterate archeological stuff.

That Calf Creek Station, I went up there one day, and I knew the engineers were talking about putting a pipeline in there for a spring development so they could pipe water down there, and here's this trench four foot deep, comes down off the hill and right up to the building. Well, I knew that was an archeological sight, because Gary McClain had registered it. I'd seen the paper on it, and Gary and I had talked about it. So, I went back and I asked the ranger if there had been a cultural review. And no, so I got on the fight, and so the [forest] supervisor did stop the engineers from doing anything else until Cynthia Hamlett, who was the archaeologist, came out, and her and I and Vicki went out there, and we dug a little test strip, and down about a foot deep we found the most beautiful obsidian knife I've ever seen in my life. We don't know how much stuff they [the engineers] dug up!

There's a story I could tell you about Calf Creek Station. There's an old story around White Sulphur that the area down there's haunted. And this cabin the Forest Service put there in the

'40s, put it together from old CCC buildings, these stories have been around about this area being haunted down there. There was a couple times I stayed down there by myself when I was working trails, and I'd hear these things you know, I didn't pay too much attention to it, at night. One winter we were down there working on a timber sale. We were going in on snow machines, and it was getting down around 10 below at night, and there was maybe a foot and a half of snow. There was myself and Dick Turner and Jim Eckland and Marlon Johnson. I was sleeping on the bottom bunk on one side, and Marlon was above me, and then Jim Eckland and Turner were on the other side. I woke up sometime during the night, I'd say around midnight. I could hear somebody, you know how snow crunches, there was somebody walking, coming from one of the outhouses, come around the side of the cabin and around the front and stepped up on the porch and stamped there feet, and that was it. And I see Dick Turner was lying there, and I said, "Dick who was that?". He said, "I don't know." I said, "You heard it didn't you?" He said, "Yeah". Well, about that time Marlon moved above me and Jim were still in the bunks, so we laid there and pretty soon he steps back off the porch and around the other side of the building, and we had two propane bottles sitting there, and they kind of banged together and then the footsteps kind of dwindled off, and that was it. I said, "Dick, whoever it was left." We couldn't figure out who would've been walking around out there. The next morning we went out, and there were no footprints anywhere. Later that spring I was down there and the propane bottles banged together again and footsteps on the porch. Lots of people kind of laugh at me. That's fine I know what I heard.

JP: Particularly when a couple of you heard the same thing!

It was a couple years later that Larry O'Connell had quite a crew there one summer doing timber "stand exams" or something, and he didn't have room for everybody in the bunkhouses in White Sulphur, so he used Calf Creek. He had two gals working for him, so he put them down there. Well, they were there for about a month, and you would never get them back there. You would not get either one of those girls to go back up there.

In talking about this, I think it was Tom Colburn, he was an old timer there in White Sulphur, he was telling me that years ago there was a George McGuire that had homesteaded down in that country. It was in the '30s or early '40s, '30s I think, this old Indian woman came into White Sulphur and she was looking...well, her tribe had gotten in a battle with another tribe and she had been captured and she had been raised by this other tribe. She was trying to find where this had happened. She was, I think, 9 or 10 years old when this happened. She was describing this country, and everybody figured it was out in there. George McGuire had this homestead just a little ways from there, so he took her with him. They got down there to Calf Creek and she said, "This is it, this is where it happened." In the battle, a lot of them had been killed and she had been taken prisoner. She was in her 70s to 80s, somewhere in there, so it was in the 1850s or 1860s this had happened. You always wonder if there isn't some connection with all of this. But I know what I heard that night, and Turner knew what he heard [laughs].

JP: I think all too often we just ignore those things like that, thinking it just cannot be real.

GC: There are some others that I know that won't stay there. It never bothered me to stay there.

JP: Who built that cabin, do you know?

GC: The building was put up... the Forest Service, George Cocoran I think, put it together. It was just little sections put together. There was a homestead there on down below in the creek bottom at one time. A lot of people said that all that noise down there was that homesteader looking for his mule. My suspicion is it had something to do with that battle that took place.

Gary McLain from Kalispell, who was killed in that wreck, was a good friend of mine.

JP: Yes, I knew him too.

GC: Gary and I had spent a lot of time chasing around in the Castles. We found quite a few artifacts. Gary and I were up here in the Castles on Whetstone Ridge. There's a.... it was written up by a gal writing her master thesis as wicki-ups and game traps, and I never did buy it, not where they're at, and having been around them. Gary went with me one day, and we went up, and pretty well decided that there wasn't any way they could be wicki-ups. They didn't fit any of the criteria in lots of way. What happened, there was a guy from Billings, I can't remember his name, an amateur archeologist, he's the one who originally decided they were wicki-ups, and somehow this gal got a hold of it. She'd only been up there for a couple hours one day, that's all the time she spent up there. Gary and I figured they were.... see there was a military fort up here at the mouth Spring Creek. It was when Chief Joseph was making his trip through with the Nez Pierce, and we kind of figured that stuff piled up there, that she thought was wicki-ups, and game traps, was for signal fires by the cavalry. Because, if you were on that ridge you can see Flathead Pass over out of the Bridger's, you can see Judith Gap, and you can see down in the Shields country. You can see a lot of country from up there. We figured that's what it was. The military had put that up there, because it just fit that a lot better. Gary was always gonna go into Missoula and get into those old military archives and see if he could find any records on this Fort, any of the diaries connected with it.

JP: What would the fort have been called?

GC: Fort Howe, after Mount Howe I think. The fort was right down here (looking at map). Sky Halsey has a fox farm there now.

JP: Where were you saying the signal fires would have been?

GC: Up at Whetstone Ridge. It looks to be more logical that's what they were used for, or what they were intended for. If they would see Chief Joseph coming through, they would set those signal fires off. Whether it was connected with Chief Joseph, or if it was connected with

something else, but we figured it was more logical that's what it was, than for them to be wicki-ups. The one in particular was a big old pitch snag, probably about four feet in diameter, and these poles were just leaned up against it. Well, there's no way to get in it. If it was a wicki-up, you got to get inside of it for shelter. There was no way to get in there for any shelter. There was nothing in there. It was just a big old pitch stump with all these poles leaning up against it. The same with the game trap, it would not trap game. There was no way you could trap game into it. It was just piles of dead material, all piled up into piles is what it amounted to.

JP: It would be interesting to look for, in the military records, and see what they say about that.

GC: Yeah, if a person could find the diary for that fort, which there would have been one, a daily log you know. It could possibly say something about it. I do have an old military campaign map. I think it was, the base was 1856, and then it's kept up until '73. It shows the military campaign route through here, but I don't think it shows the fort. Up here at Silvertip Land and Livestock, the old, old house down there, which has pretty well fallen in, was the Officer's quarters for a little bit. They never did get the blockhouse built. That's my understanding anyway. I know Dad talked about that you used to be able to find cannonballs up there in the willows where they practiced shooting.

SJ: Well, thank you for this interview. It's been interesting.

GC: I don't consider myself an old timer, but I guess there aren't too many left.

JP: You certainly seem to know a fair amount of history. Thank you very much for your time.

[End of Interview]