

Maureen and Mike

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**Oral History Number: 172-016, 017**

**Interviewee: Doug Houston**

**Interviewer: Bruce Van Voorhis**

**Date of Interview: July 28, 1981**

**Project: Nick Sundt Smokejumpers Oral History Project**

*Note: This interview is difficult to hear due to a consistent hum in the background.*

Bruce Van Voorhis: [unintelligible]. You got a degree in recreation and park administration from Eastern Washington State.

Doug Houston: State College, yeah.

BVV: Cheney?

DH: Cheney, Washington, yeah.

BVV: You lived in an area [unintelligible]?

DH: Yeah.

BVV: Were there a lot of jumpers that you were exposed to early, but it wasn't a thing where, gee, I want to be a smokejumper when you were a little kid?

DH: Sure, sure, yeah.

BVV: You applied after high school, and you didn't get it then but you got in after college—after you graduated from college. You worked on state fire crews between high school and becoming a jumper?

DH: I worked on some big fires in '72—in 1972—when Washington was burning.

BVV: You've heard a lot of stories about jumpers from other [unintelligible]. You said it's more like an organized [unintelligible] than a lot of jobs, [unintelligible] than anything else.

DH: Yeah, exactly.

BVV: One thing that you like about the job is that you still get to work out and the physical contact, except it's [unintelligible]. You like getting dirty.

DH: I like getting dirty out there, bring back the old sandbox days. [laughs]

BVV: Your wife might have something to say about that.

DH: Yeah, I'm sure.

BVV: You like to travel and see a lot of country, you said, where people don't have an opportunity to go. The reason you come back [unintelligible] is the reason you started plus the people and the people is the team. [unintelligible] Like spring training in baseball.

DH: Yeah, it's coming back.

BVV: You keep in touch with old jumpers. In fact, you said someone is from Portland or from [unintelligible]. You're the training and operations foreman and you plan to make it a career. You said you can't imagine a better unless the rules and regulations get to be too much. The more rules and regulations come down, the harder it gets.

One of the rules and regulations you mentioned was it seems to be a policy this year that a certain base has its [unintelligible] fire, then jumpers from other bases can fight the fire [unintelligible]. Is that a written policy, or just the way things are going.

DH: No, it's just the way things are going. There's nothing written anywhere. It's just coming out of regional office and at this dispatch, the regional dispatch [unintelligible] are doing this and it's just a one-person decision as far as I know. No, there's nothing—it's just that [unintelligible]. Not worth [unintelligible] or lack thereof. The one guy that might have something to do with it—I'm not sure—he's already resigned. He quit as of the 2nd of August, and I read about his resignation letter yesterday, which not a lot of people have seen. It's [unintelligible] hardcore. It's [unintelligible] on the organization—

[talking at same time; unintelligible section]

BVV: You mentioned about that stand-by decision that it's not a people decision, but it doesn't seem to be a decision based on economics [unintelligible].

DH: [unintelligible]. Yeah, I'm not sure what it's based on. I really don't. But a lot of decisions are passed along that way, which you just don't know where they're coming from.

BVV: There's nothing written in that particular situation so it's not like MacDonald (?) or somebody decided this is the way it's going to be and wrote it down. Policy is sort of like what one dispatcher decided to do that—or it seems to be.

DH: Yeah, as far as I know, that's the way it's come down and they may be something more behind it, but I don't know about that. I don't think so.

BVV: Sometimes, you get—a lot of jumpers feel that the system or whatever is whittling away at [unintelligible] benefits and stuff like that. From what you see in the RO [regional office], is

that a conscious effort by one person, do you think? Or is it just a hodgepodge of things that just kind of been happening?

DH: No, it's definitely a one-person effort. The regional fire staff, he is—It was his decision for the last two years to do away—unless there's some underlying pressure from above, from the Washington office, that's where it would have to come from to do away with the other two bases, La Grande and Cave Junction, and consolidate everything right here and make it a smaller, small unit. All of that as far as I know is a one-person decision, and nobody was consulted. Nobody within the organization itself as far as the jumper organization was consulted as far as any kind of input at all. It was just passed down.

BVV: I asked MacDonald when I was up there a few weeks ago about that. Apparently, there was a study in the mid- to late-'70s from the Washington office—some guy and a group of people came out—and they looked at where all the jumpers were and the numbers and so forth—where they covered—and saw a big overlap. So, what they—according to MacDonald—what they decided to do was keep the numbers the same but move the players around. That's why Cave's closing and La Grande's supposed to close. I don't think he mentioned anything about Winthrop.

DH: Well, it's—

BVV: It's there for sure. They've closed all the lofts. All the lofts they've closed, except—

DH: And all the training as far as new people is all here too.

BVV: They do their own refresher training.

DH: Yeah, they do their own refresher. That decision—that was supposed to be a regional decision too, but that never came about and they finally just decided to and leave people at their own respective bases to train the old guys. Yeah, that was a big deal. Winthrop got [unintelligible] part of the decision too, whether to close Winthrop and [unintelligible] move them to Wenatchee.

BVV: Oh, have a smokejumper base at Wenatchee?

DH: Yeah, it's be a, probably, satellite base, just for the summer months.

BVV: Would people out of Redmond satellite there.

DH: Yeah, or they would just hire—Redmond would hire people, and they would just be there for the summer. [unintelligible].

BVV: Where the people at Winthrop now, they'd just move them to Wenatchee and satellite. They wouldn't employ them all year round like they do now probably.

DH: Now, we have two here year-round.

BVV: You and Reno.

DH: Yeah, Reno. When I left in November, we had seven that were year-round. And now we have two—just one [unintelligible] that left. [unintelligible] got this job. Our training foreman left, and one of the squad leaders left and the [unintelligible] in the office left, and our warehouseman left. The year before that two other—a loft foreman left and then a squad leader left. Also, last year, we lost two W-E-6s (?)—jumpers—they also left. One guy was a squad leader last year—he left too. So, it's been just a real big turnover in the last two years. Real big. The loft foreman who had left, he went to Lake Chelan and took an F.M.O. position there, and since he quit—quit the Forest Service. Good man, boy, he had a lot of years in and a lot [unintelligible].

BVV: Do you think the people that are here this year from Winthrop maybe have that attitude of a little bit more than people who jumped out of here all the time? The attitude that [unintelligible] or the Forest Service or whoever is trying to whittle away at the jumper program and—

DH: Well, possibly. Possibly. Because it's been talked about more up there in the last two years than anywhere else I'm sure.

BVV: Because you guys [unintelligible], I didn't realize all those people had left.

DH: Yeah, yeah. We lost a lot of people, and they were a lot of years. Lot of years in the number of people that were there. One squad leader had 13 years, jumping and had been squad leader for a heck of long time. The loft foreman had 11 years in. Training foreman had 9 years in. Squad leaders had 8 years in. There was a hell of a big turnover. [unintelligible].

BVV: You said last year, in '80, you had 7 full-time people up there, and now there's just two.

DH: Two, yeah. And a lot of it has to do with the unknowing. Hanging onto a job that you don't really know if it's going to exist the following year. People just finally decided, well, that's not the type of career that they want. If they want to do something in the Forest Service, they're going to more or less be forced to get out. Although, they were all given an opportunity to come down here. They could have all taken positions down here at one time or another. Either squad leaders or training foreman.

BVV: They would have been full-time jobs?

DH: Yeah, they would have been full-time jobs. They decided that they didn't want to come here. [unintelligible] for some it was okay.

BVV: The water was safe (?).

DH: Yeah, the water was safe.

BVV: [unintelligible].

[long pause]

DH: The whole concept of centralizing and going from here, you know, it can work. That I've seen. It's just that the smaller bases—I'm still into small bases. I mean, it's the people are good, return rate, the quality of people every year, morales. It's really [unintelligible] the newer people. They aren't that big up in Missoula, but I'm sure that a lot of those guys don't know each other at all. It seems to function better that way. But centralizing here is the way [unintelligible] within the next two or three years. I'm sure it'll work without any problem. Watching Alaska and see—watching their system work. They're pretty lax on a lot of things up there, but they move people around daily like it was nothing. They move people up there [unintelligible] going there and they just satellite them and maybe send 40, 50, or 60 people out of Fairbanks at the [unintelligible] and they stay there for three weeks or a month or however long the fire [unintelligible] and then they come back. It was not uncommon at all to see three or four plane loads of people going up to either one of those places—[unintelligible]. That's a [unintelligible] operation of what this is going to be. I'm sure it can work easily.

BVV: [unintelligible] 60, 70 people.

DH: Yeah, 60, 70. And they're—they're being pushed to add on additional people [unintelligible] up there.

BVV: In Winthrop?

DH: No, not here. Up there. I'm sure they'll probably send up probably 70 or so.

BVV: [unintelligible sentence]. Do you think right now is sort of a transitional thing and it's just that a lot of [unintelligible] have to change—that have jumped for X number of years—sort of have to change some attitudes about the way the game's going to be played and all?

DH: Yeah, yeah. Yeah, that's true. I mean, we're being forced to change if we want to stay in it because the smaller bases just aren't going to be there. You have to be willing to come to Redmond first of all, and then probably willing to travel more than what we have in the past.

BVV: A lot of the guys like to travel.

DH: Yeah, a lot of us like to travel sure.

BVV: I think people may get nervous, like the people you mentioned, that they've invested all that time and [unintelligible] there goes the loft and there goes—you see people dwindling, the numbers dwindling. [unintelligible] I've been here for ten years or whatever—

DH: [unintelligible] and then one guy had a big farm and stuff. You have to weigh both sides and see if it's worthwhile. Yeah, we had a big skit on the rats—rats overboard on a sinking ship. The guys decorated with some rat noses and ears and tails—did a little skit on rats overboard. At the last termination party up there. [laughs] [unintelligible].

BVV: I don't know if I asked you this yesterday or not. Do you think you jump to prove something to yourself, about yourself?

DH: No.

BVV: Did I ask you about the sensation of jumping?

DH: Yeah.

BVV: Did I ask you whether you consider it dangerous or not?

DH: Yeah, and I do.

BVV: Oh, what's your wife think you jumping?

DH: She's finally accepting it. This year has been the best so far. [unintelligible] she's [unintelligible] summer eventually sometime. I don't think [unintelligible] happen, but it's probably close to normal as it could possibly get. She doesn't like me traveling that much.

BVV: How long have you been married?

DH: Seven years.

BVV: So, when she met you, you were a jumper then.

DH: Yeah. We actually been together eight years. We've been married seven. So, yeah I come up summer and [unintelligible] the next year.

BVV: So she's been exposed to it; she sort of knew what she was getting into [unintelligible].

DH: She knew more or less. Her brother jumped for three years.

BVV: [unintelligible].

DH: No, no he got out of it though. [unintelligible] in the ground.

A lot of her friends, she grew up in Okanagan—it's one of the [unintelligible], so she knew a lot of guys from Okanagan who jumped too. She knew a lot of them.

BVV: She's pretty [unintelligible] like you had.

Does she ever worry about you getting hurt and stuff like that?

DH: I'm sure. I'm sure she does.

BVV: You said you've been married seven years and she's been around it a long time, and this is the first year she's really sort of accepted it.

DH: She doesn't like the [unintelligible] being gone all summer. Two summers ago I was gone 62 days out of the summer—away from home. Away from home on trips, and then I was away also on fires too. So, she didn't really like that.

BVV: You went to Idaho or something like that?

DH: Yeah. Missoula four times. Went to La Grande, came down here. Went to Redding. Jumped three fires in Idaho. Just gone a lot of the time.

BVV: Plus, the local fire.

DH: Plus, the local fires that were—this was [unintelligible], and the local fires were on the—they are on different forests so they were still two-day or sometimes three-day, so additional [unintelligible]. She didn't like that that much. Especially a lot of friends going out to the lake and stuff with boats and we did a lot of water skiing—well, she did. [laughs] I was never there.

BVV: Do the wives sort of get together when the—

DH: Not much, no. No, there's a few that are pretty good friends. No, not very many. Probably not that many. There's not that many wives first of all.

BVV: Plus, a lot of them work and they're gone during working hours.

DH: Yeah, during working hours, and then a lot of times the get together with the girls that they work with too. My wife works, and one of her best friends down here is—well, her best friends, I guess, are the people that she worked with. There's not that many wives anymore. Used to be



when [unintelligible] they got together all the time. There probably six or seven of them that hung out together a lot.

BVV: When was that? [unintelligible] then went to Winthrop and then [unintelligible].

DH: Yeah, '73 to '78. Went up there '78, '79, '80, and then just came back. From '73...well, from '74 to like '77 maybe, the wives were pretty tight. Things were more—more of that [unintelligible].

BVV: [unintelligible] what the guys are going to be like or anything, but I was sort of surprised to find out how many are making it a career type thing and how many live here all year round [unintelligible] families and things like that. [unintelligible].

DH: Yeah, it is. [unintelligible] jump and either work on [unintelligible] hanging around and trying to find something else during winter—[unintelligible].

BVV: [unintelligible].

DH: [unintelligible sentence]. You get a month, maybe a little more than a month before the skiing season starts, and actually you can usually start working in November, and then you get laid off in, say, March or early part of April and you have a month there before you start jumping. So, [unintelligible]—

BVV: [unintelligible]

DH: Yeah. [unintelligible].

BVV: What do you usually make in a season? I know it's hard for you because you're—

DH: I don't know. It—

BVV: Full-time.

DH: Yeah, full-time. It depends on the season. Like this summer, it's been really slow. You probably average \$1,200 of overtime during the summer. About the [unintelligible] wage, I don't know [unintelligible] around 25 somewhere for the whole year. For the season. I'm not sure.

BVV: Like five to six or six to eight, or—

DH: Yeah, six to eight probably. Might even be more than that. Could be more. [unintelligible] hours of overtime, probably 10 to 12.

BVV: That'd just be for three or four months?

DH: Yeah, just the four months. Ten to twelve, yeah, four months. That's about a 400 hour average overtime summer. This summer started out that way, pretty [unintelligible] got over 100 hours in two weeks that we were in Alaska. Then went back and were expected to keep rolling down here. Just haven't done it. Last year—[unintelligible] last year were Warner and Vickers and I think they had 550, 560 hours, which that's considerable. But that's okay.

BVV: When you say 10 to 12, that's based on PS-9 (?) pay, right?

DH: Yeah.

US: Did you hear what that broadcast was?

DH: No.

[unintelligible conversation]

BVV: How do you usually spend it? You just probably spend it on your family, right?

DH: [unintelligible]. Skiing takes money. Everything takes money. All the other necessities. Houses.

BVV: Wait, are you building a place or buying a place?

DH: [unintelligible] that we've kept and then we have one more here too that we're just buying now. And those take money.

BVV: Is it a place here that—farm or ranch? [unintelligible]

DH: No, it's in town. Two kids, I didn't want to be driving. They're in [unintelligible] drive back and forth.

BVV: You just moved down here last winter, right? This will be—

DH: Yeah, this will be year-round for...This will be my home port.

BVV: [unintelligible] the off-season. [unintelligible], so there's only two weeks out of the year [unintelligible]. Is that the way it works?

DH: Well, I haven't taken...[unintelligible] two weeks off. [unintelligible] last year I needed it to move and do a bunch of remodeling and stuff. But this year I don't know if I'll be forced to take that or not. I might be.

BVV: Just depends whether they have work or not.

DH: Yeah. Workload here is whatever they want to give.

BVV: How do they work with—you're a [unintelligible]?

DH: Yeah.

BVV: I know they guarantee so many pay periods, but then within that guaranteed pay periods is there [unintelligible] in that?

DH: [unintelligible section; talking at same time] certain amount of annual leave at the first of the year, and then you use that up some throughout the year of whatever, whenever you can arrange it. [unintelligible] accumulate as you go along, and after three or four years of service—you start out at four hours—accumulate four hours per pay period and same with sick leave. Then after three years, you bump up to six hours a pay period. Then after 12, I think, 12 years, eight hours a pay period. Then it starts adding up a lot more. I use mine [unintelligible]. I got to save up to 70 to 80 hours so I can take off a week or 10 days and [unintelligible].

BVV: Do you think more jumpers are becoming career-oriented, or do you sort of think this year's sort of a fluke? I mean, you've got all these experienced guys, and most of them have their college education out of the way or are going to medical school or something like that.

DH: I don't think so. I think it's pretty much normal. We've got a lot of guys for the past—we've had a lot of guys in the past that jumped for five, six years, and we have a real good corps of returning...We did the average at NCSB [Northern Cascades Smokejumper Base], and the average—well, since day one, we did [unintelligible], did that a couple years ago, and the average was four years and 41, 42 jumps for those four years and their last name started with H. [laughs]

BVV: [unintelligible]

DH: [unintelligible] since day one. [unintelligible].

[Break in audio]

BVV: Why do you think people stick with it that long? Or make it—five years, that's not really a career, but they stick with it quite a while. But some of these people have been jumping, you know, like yourself, nine years—some guys 10, 11, or whatever. They want to do it until—Ed (?) even said he wanted until he was 50. [unintelligible] is that sort of how you feel too?

DH: Yeah, unless something better comes along, you know. [unintelligible] fire, I think, for one thing. This is a great means to get there. [unintelligible] parachuting, sure. [unintelligible] you get the thrill of the jumping too. So, that's a big plus. Then for guys on a normal season, you make some pretty good dollars for the [unintelligible] you've spent. Just a lot of guys that aren't ready for a full-time job, year-round, that brings a lot of guys back too.

[Break in audio]

BVV: Do you think—I sort of get the impression that job satisfaction is more important to a lot of jumpers more than money. [unintelligible] but when a jumper looks for something else, some of them have sort of expressed this that they're going to jump—as you just said—as long as they can until something better comes along that they'd enjoy maybe as much doing this or—

DH: Yeah, yeah. I'm sure that's got to be a big part of it. Yeah, the [unintelligible] fires in Alaska and the job satisfaction from going out and some guys end up camping out for a week and actually not doing a whole hell of lot of work on the fires. There's not job satisfaction there, whereas down here putting out some [unintelligible] fires and stuff, you—

BVV: [unintelligible]

DH: Yeah, as far as fighting fire—

BVV: [unintelligible].

DH: Yeah, yeah. So you get that job satisfaction, sure, you get it for doing a good job out here and jumping and stuff. Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs and some these other guys. The dollars are down the line a ways.

BVV: [pauses] You sort of see jumpers in that respect as a degree apart of the general society's attitudes about their job or their job satisfaction comes before the dollars?

DH: Yeah, possibly. Possibly.

BVV: I get that impression when I look around, and I see a lot of people that really aren't happy with the job they have or they're just motivated by the dollars Or maybe they couldn't find the job they like, and so the dollar—

DH: It's the only thing they have to work for. Yeah, that's true. That's true. The dollar still a factor here, I think, but not as much. I think they'd rather do the job and get paid fairly for what they're doing. You've got a lot of guys that you'd know unless a recession type and it's hard time right now for a lot of people in the United States. There's still guy's here buying land and

building and stuff. Putting their money away, I think, a lot or saving up so they can finally end up doing something with it.

BVV: Something major in their life that they really wanted to do, like buy land or a house.

DH: Yeah, the job itself entirely different from anything else that I'm sure you can find anywhere.

BVV: [unintelligible] a summer job basically, but you can make good money doing it and most of the—

DH: The job satisfaction.

BVV: Do you think more jumpers want to make it a career out of itself, or is that—You can only have so much [unintelligible] so—

DH: Yeah, that's going to restrict the number of [unintelligible]. I don't think so not so much, because once guys start moving up, it's a different step. It's not that much separation, but then again, you're in charge of a lot of people. I think a lot of guys are really looking at it as a career type, as moving into squad leader then—

BVV: Or loft foreman and sticking around until they're 50 or 40 or something. Maybe the overall attitude that you see is a lot of people want to do it until they find something else that they enjoy and move on to that or they eventually get sick of jumping or maybe just the effort of keeping in shape that guys have to—

DH: And it finally comes to a point say, "Well, guys, I've got these two three degrees. Maybe I better do something with them before it's too late." And then they're like, "What the heck do I do now?" Several guys, you know, that probably should be doing something with their degree, maybe. Then again, you get out and do something with your degree and it's totally not anything you expected it to be and they end up coming back. We talked to two or three guys that are going to apply next year again and jumped before. One guy just went into the Marines, and he's getting out some time this winter. He's going to come back, or apply to come back, and the other guy has been logging for the last few years and it's just something that gets—Just like Zeke coming back. Kind of gets inbred. Lot of guys I know, talking with old jumpers, it's...I mean, they'll talk to you about it for hours. Relay those stories and stuff, and it's a lot of [unintelligible].

The consolidation and stuff too, I think, that the job as far as squad leader jobs there'll probably be many, but they'll be harder to come by. Because we'll have consolidation of all the bases into one, and we'll have to move [unintelligible] in here or at least offer those positions. The guys that are in the overhead positions right now haven't really been in the positions very long. It looks like they'll probably be in those positions for a while.

BVV: They're all pretty young.

DH: Yeah, everybody's pretty young and haven't been squad leaders—like, [unintelligible], he's been in the squad leader position the longest. But some guys, like there are three of us that are, actually, just past a full year of being a squad leader. [unintelligible]

BVV: Now, we've moved to controversial subjects. [laughs] Do you think women can be smokejumpers, and if so, how will they affect the program?

DH: Yes. Yes, I'm sure they can. There's one in the program right now—

BVV: Yeah, over in McCall.

DH: She is proving that it can be done. I'm sure that we'll see more and more. Next year I'm sure we'll have two rookies. I don't know how many will make it or anything, but I'm sure there's some that will do a fine job.

BVV: Some people have expressed the opinion that there's maybe a pressure to get women into smokejumping, whether they lower the standards or whether they more or less say directly or hint that "You guys got to take some women."

Do you think that's coming from above?

DH: Oh, yeah. Yeah, that's real. There's no doubt about it. I'm sure the one lady that's women's coordinator in the RO will be part of the selection—she'll probably have something to do selecting women to make sure that we do have some if we do have a lot of rookies next year..

BVV: What's her name because I've heard people refer to her? Do you know what it is?

DH: Mary. Oh, man. I can't remember.

BVV: I'm sure you've got [unintelligible].

DH: No, I really haven't had that much contact with her, so I don't even see her, don't even know the lady. [unintelligible] her last name, I can't remember.

BVV: [unintelligible]. She's the big pusher and mover in the region?

DH: She is the big push, yeah, as far as her name is the one that keeps popping up. She was on the selection committee for the IR crew, and that's the first time that women have been on the IH crew here at Redmond since 1964. First time ever. She was on the committee and pushed hard to get four women on our crew. It's three now, four when they started.

BVV: They weren't on top on the GS and on the roster [unintelligible].

DH: Yeah, and that's going to have to happen with the selection of women too, I'm sure, because I don't think they all... We'll probably have to get down to that score, and there's more women that are getting the fire experience every year. That's all you really need for this job to be eligible.

BVV: Is this civil service...that what's it was called?

DH: Yeah, Office of...OPM. OPM—Office of Personnel Management—that service went by the wayside couple of years ago.

BVV: Oh, really?

DH: Yeah. They made it Office of Personnel Management and [unintelligible] went into another section also.

BVV: Is that federal government-wide the Office of Personnel Management, or is that just Forest Service?

DH: I think it's nationwide. Yeah, I think it's federal.

BVV: You know, you'll probably have some rookies here next year, and like you said, good chance some of them will be women.

DH: Yeah.

BVV: Do you think that there's going to be...let's say there's three women, and they all [unintelligible] just normal, do you think there's going to be a pressure from above to say, "Well, you've got three women, now, I would think at least one of them could make it." Do you think that—

DH: Well, there might be. Might be. [unintelligible]...I'm sure there might be, but then again, they might look at the program and say, "Well, you guys were too hard. You're treating them just like any of the guys." But I don't see the rules changing any, or at all, to make it easier for the girls because part of our job is the packouts are a lot tougher than just a lot of the work that you do. You need the arm strength; you need the upper body strength. You need strong legs for the packouts, for use of chainsaws, or for the fighting fire—for all that stuff. It would take a lot of pressure to make us change our standards. Apparently the one in McCall was pretty strong. She could do all that stuff. She didn't...they had a packout—three-and-a-half mile packout—they had to do in a couple of hours. She didn't make that the first time, but I guess four or five of the guys didn't make it either. They let them do it again, and they all passed it that time. So,

evidently, she can do it. I've never seen her or anything, but I'm sure there's a bunch of them around. Amazons! [laughs]

BVV: [unintelligible].

DH: No, she's actually small. Yeah, that was one reason...she was washed out a couple of years ago because she went under the weight. She had to be 130, yeah, and she came in at a 132 or 133 pounds. She's only 5'7" or so. I'm sure she's back down below...She's probably in 120 range bracket now, so she's not very big.

BVV: [unintelligible] if you've got a heavy pack on. You pack almost your weight out of those.

DH: Yeah, she'd get it 110 pounds usually, it'd to be real tough. Especially in steep terrain [unintelligible] around Lake Chelan were you end up having to repel down a lot of places just to get off these cliffs and stuff. There's no other way to get down.

BVV: So you mean as a jumper, you repel off the cliff to get down.

DH: Yeah, you have to lower your gear down, even out on [unintelligible] there's a lot places you go down and it's so rough and brushy and it's just god-awful country, you have take [unintelligible] lower your gear bag down below you and then make a seat for yourself, go around a tree a couple of times, and lower yourself down over the cliff. It's real tough on a lot of guys. So it'd take a tough couple of ladies. But if they can do it, then fine—more power to them. [pauses] All the ones I've seen on fire crews—organized fire crews—they're pretty tough. They talk as tough as any of the guys, and they take a lot of guff and they dish out a lot too.

BVV: You know you were talking about repelling down a cliff or whatever, let's say it's a canyon or whatever and you're going that way, you got to go back up the canyon. You can't repel uphill.

DH: No, no.

BVV: So how the hell do you get up the other side of the canyon if it's as steep as the one you just came down.

DH: Oh boy, I don't know. You'd have to look at it.

BVV: Sometimes what you just...you just walk around the canyon—

DH: Use the contour, yeah. Yeah, that's the best way because you don't want to get down in any drainage bottoms unless you have to. But it gets so brushy and ugly down in the drainage bottoms, you just stay up as high as you can until you finally have to get down.



BVV: In other words, you got to around and you try and go—if it's like a box canyon or something, you'll walk around the top of it—

DH: Yeah, yeah, and go down that—yep, yep. And stay as high as you could. Just struggle. Yep, longest packout I had was 23 miles.

BVV: Packout?

DH: Yeah.

BVV: How long did that take you.

DH: It took a day. Yeah, one day. Because a pack string came in and got all of our gear. [laughs]

BVV: God, that helps.

DH: That took us eight hours to walk, to walk it. Feet were kind of raw. There's a lot of 13—8, 10, 12, 13-mile packouts. Depending on a normal year, there's a lot of them. That's a long ways for 100, 110 pounds on your back. But you can normally do it in a day.

BVV: Yeah, I find that pretty amazing—you fight the fire and maybe that takes roughly two days and you're busting pretty hard to put the fire out [unintelligible]. A lot of time you don't get sleep or you don't get to eat, and then you got to put all that stuff in your pack and hike it out—

DH: Carry it out, yeah.

BVV: Then sometimes it's just a—when you get a big bust, it's just a continuous circle. As soon as you get back here, you grab something to eat and you, sometimes, probably don't even get to do that. Then you go some more.

DH: Yeah, it's [unintelligible] work [unintelligible] for all the guys to get back in and have enough time to wash their face and hands and suit back up again—go out. Yeah, it's [unintelligible]. Guys are in shape.

BVV: Yeah, they're in great shape even—

DH: Yeah, that's true, that's true.

BVV: So you really don't see women, if they can do the job, having a big effect on the program?

DH: I don't think so. No.

BVV: Do you think any standards will have to be lowered for them to become jumpers?

DH: I don't know. Depends on the pressure from up above. They won't call it lowering; they'll call it changing. [laughs] [unintelligible]. Yeah, that's very true. Talk to [unintelligible] about it, and he says, "Well, they'll just change the standards. They'll put a lady in there to help you make the guidelines for the standards that they go by." He's going, "Well, it's made by men for men and they'll be telling you that that's what it was." So, I don't know. It's going to take pressure from above to do it. We're not looking forward to doing anything any differently than what we've done in the past.

BVV: [unintelligible].

DH: Yeah.

BVV: All this is hypothetical stuff. But anyway—

DH: Yeah, that's true.

BVV: Do you think they might even, instead of just lowering the general standards—PT standards or whatever—they might have a standards for women and a standard for men?

DH: Boy, I don't know. It's a possibility, yeah. It'd be for the [unintelligible] test, but that's a little different I guess.

BVV: That basically just checks your body of efficiency, really.

DH: Yeah. Yeah, sure.

BVV: As a way to see how good a shape your [unintelligible].

If—when women become jumpers, like say we've already got one here, do you think they'll be accepted by the group as—the camaraderie aspect of it?

DH: Pretty much, I think. Depends on the individuals I'm sure.

BVV: Both the men and the women.

DH: Yeah. Both sides. It just depends on how well she can, or they can, perform. And personalities and attitudes just like anybody else.

[long pause]

BVV: [unintelligible] Is the attitude of [unintelligible] rookie training?

DH: I think so, yeah. Sure. You got to have a good attitude. You have to come in with a good attitude, and you got to carry it through I'm sure. Yeah, if you don't, you're going to go by the wayside because there's—the trainers will give a little static (?) to the people from time to time depending on what they do and how well they perform. If they don't have a good attitude and try to gel together too, as a working crew, then they...and help each other, they just go by the wayside.

BVV: In other words, that guy who comes in and tries to tough it out himself, [unintelligible] the help [unintelligible].

DH: [unintelligible], yeah. Yeah, in our group there was 14 of us, and everybody made it no problem. All 14 made it. In fact, it was really a good group. Everybody worked together and yelled and screamed a lot, and it worked out really well. Like the last two classes they started with 34, I think, and ended up with 13, and it's just the attitude has a lot to do with it. Coming in and how much you want the job and how much you want to put out to get it, too, has a lot to do with it. A lot of people just don't come with the right attitude or they just don't come in shape. That'll kill your attitude, plus your physical off at the same time.

We've had guys that admit they've come in with a poor attitude and just said, "Hey, I'm just not ready. I'm just not ready for it." Physically, and then mentally. Then come back the next year another base and do really well.

[long pause]

BVV: [unintelligible].

DH: Yeah, [unintelligible] shorthand?

BVV: Yeah, I would. Sometimes I [unintelligible].

Sort of getting back to the thing about the rookie groups. Is this sort of a deal where if you're a rookie and if some guy's having a hard time either running or doing the pushups or something, you sort of give him a prod to—you can do it type thing?

DH: Yeah, there's a little—it differs every year. I've seen negative reinforcement used and positive [unintelligible], "Why don't you just give up? You can't do it."

BVV: Another rookie will say that?

DH: No, another squad leader was saying that. Then another squad leader will get him off to the side and try to pump him up. I know we did that with Koertje [Scott Koertje] when he was—he was really poor when he was a rookie. He had a hard time running. He was a little [unintelligible]. But there's a lot of that. Lot of pull them off to the side and either counsel a guy

and say, well, trying to set him straight as far as where he's at and what's expected of him. Then if he doesn't show that he's going to make a vast improvement in the next couple of days, try to talk to him, see what he wants to be doing, and see what he thinks his chances are. Lot of times they'll go from here, and if it looks like they're not going to make it, we'll try to get them on a different crew somewhere—district. Try to get them a job. Lot of guys just don't come in ready. Yeah.

BVV: When you say the negative reinforcement, like say, [unintelligible] "Why don't you give it up?" Is that just to sort of goad him a little bit and see if that's going to pump him up to where he can say, "Well, you son of a bitch, I'm going show you that I can."

DH: Yeah.

BVV: When you got to—I guess it pretty obvious out there who can physically do it, can make it, and who's not. The guy that's always running last and he's about to die, versus [unintelligible]. Do the squad leaders have a meeting and get together, or is it just you're out there watching and just sort of stand there and sort of say, "Well, Joe Blow over there, they're going to have to talk to him," or something like that.

DH: No, yeah, we talk a lot. All the trainers get together and talk a lot about different people and try to evaluate all the way through the training so everybody knows who's doing well, doing poorly—who's hanging right in there. Yeah, because some guys will be up on the tower and other guys will be over with the letdowns and one guy will be running them or guys will be running them. You don't really know unless you communicate a lot. Next year, you know, could have just a bunch of rookies, so it's going to take a lot of time. Lot of communicating.

BVV: But it's not like a meeting at the end of the day, and you say, "Well,"—you talk to whoever had PT and say—"How are they doing on PT and [unintelligible] aren't really able to run that well or do the pushups or whatever." Then you'll say, "What about letdowns," and whoever had that will say, "So-and-so is doing great letdowns, really catching on, but this other guy..." Is it a formal type thing, or is it—

DH: No, informal, but everybody is there. Everybody's involved, so it's [unintelligible]. Yeah.

BVV: It's like at the end of the day type thing, and you're just standing around and you just start talking about how everybody's doing more or less.

DH: Yeah, somebody might have the last unit, so everybody else—all the trainers are together—

BVV: Standing around watching them.

DH: Yeah, talking about it.

BVV: You mentioned that attitude was really important. This is an example I always use when I'm asking people, but you get this guy that's physically fit. He's physically prepared to do the job. He comes in and he can put out 80% and do what it takes to do everything. He does the letdowns and exits and cuts down real quick. Then you get the other guy, I guess similar to Koertje, that comes in—not good of shape, but he's got a hell of an attitude and really puts out. They're both—Koertje's sort of marginal; he could go one way or the other. And the other guy, he can definitely do the job, but do the squad leaders when they're talking and they see this guy that's really not putting out, do they say—do they try and weed him out, or do they try to make it tougher for him, or what do they try and do?

DH: No, no not really. I mean, you talk you him. Talk to him to see if he's just—course of he naturally can catch on like this and his attitude is pretty good, just talk to him and let him know that you're aware that he's coasting—could be doing a whole lot better. I've seen a lot of guys do that. And I've seen a lot of guys having a heck of a time doing pullups or pushups. Pullups, mainly, and the run—

[Break in audio]

Nobody's going to probably do 110 percent all the time just because he's a little bit weak but his attitude's so good so you help him along too. There's a lot of individual—one guy, or one squad leader will take him off to the side and talk to him and say, "Hey, you're pretty poor. You're going to have to be doing something on your own. If you're not too sore on the weekends to be working on your arm and trying to building yourself up because we only got..." Well, now they have to come and be able to pass it the first day. So that—

BVV: Is this the first year that they had that?

DH: Yeah, yeah, first year. So, it weeds out a lot right away.

BVV: The first day of PT?

DH: First day.

BVV: Is that [unintelligible] first thing they're going to do before they ever get on [unintelligible].

DH: Yeah, yeah. Before sign-up or anything, we'll have a weigh in and—this year we did step test first, and they won't even be doing step tests. They'll just be doing the mile and a half and everything else. Because the step test, you know, is more for fire fighting, and the rest is for the jumping.

BVV: Is the step test a Forest Service-wide requirement, if you're going to fight fires you got to be a certain score on it?

DH: Yeah, they have to have 45 or above if you're going to be out on the fire line. There's all kinds of different ones. Yeah, I think you have to have 35 if you're going to be in camp, like a supply officer or whatever. But you have to have a 45 if you're going to be out on the line. That's tough for a lot of people.

BVV: We were talking about the step test.

DH: [unintelligible].

BVV: [unintelligible] that the squad leader basically kind of talked to the people at [unintelligible] if you're not able to do—cut the training and the people who can cut the training but were sort of coasting by, [unintelligible] talk to or do you talk to [unintelligible]?

DH: No, you just work with those mainly. Most of the time you probably don't work with the one who's doing well that you know he's not pushing himself. He'd probably be the least of the two talked to. [unintelligible] attitude the entire summer; whereas the one who's real marginal—I mean, you've only got [unintelligible] any time because they don't pass the first day, then that's it.

You can tell, this year some of the guys came back and one had a hard time doing pullups and [unintelligible] and you know you got to do some work with that too and try to build that part up.

BVV: The guy with the [unintelligible], say, you got the whole summer to try and build him up [unintelligible].

DH: [unintelligible sentence].

BVV: What constitutes a bad attitude? I mean, really bad enough to [unintelligible]?

DH: [unintelligible sentence].

BVV: Oh, is it more a personality thing?

DH: Yeah. Yeah, more so than—

Unidentified Speaker: unintelligible]

[Break in audio]

BVV: [unintelligible] bad attitude, you see a guy that comes in and he comes in with the attitude that it's a real neat thing to do. He probably doesn't see that you kind of have to work as hard he does to get it. He may see it more as the macho type job versus the job of fire fighting.

DH: [unintelligible]. Yeah, that's true. [unintelligible] one type—know it all type. Coming in thinking well I [unintelligible] so this is the way to do it or that's not the way to do it. Or that's not how I would do it.

BVV: [unintelligible] is probably the guy you're going to try to get rid of, or—

DH: Yeah. Well, yeah. Not really try to weed out anybody. Just trying to make [unintelligible] out of them. [unintelligible] attitude in the past quite a bit; whereas you try to weed them out [unintelligible], try to take people and make them better or if they really don't know what it takes, then to let them know and [unintelligible] do whatever. Go to the district or go someplace out—do something that they're in line for.

BVV: Did you say that it used to be they would try and weed people out and now it's the attitude is to make better people out them—good jumpers out of them?

DH: Yeah, yeah it's more positive. We're trying to be more positive all time.

BVV: Is this a really recent trend about the positive attitude in training type thing? Last two or three years?

DH: Yeah, last couple years.

BVV: Before they had this change in emphasis in the training—more positive training attitude—how would they go about trying to weed out the guy that they thought that wasn't going to make it because of his attitude?

DH: You ended up just telling the guy, "There's no way you can make it. Why don't you just leave?" [unintelligible].

BVV: But if he's in good shape and if he can do a lot of the physical things that you could throw at him, he could maybe do more pushups or pullups or whatever, and he's in good enough shape that maybe a [unintelligible] to some extent but it's not going to break him so that physically he can do the job and you just can't—legally there isn't a way that you can get the guy out, but you know he's got a bad attitude or maybe a personality thing that you don't think fits in with jumping or whatever, you [unintelligible].

DH: You got him. It's up to you to try to work with him.

BVV: Do you think that as a group, then, they would sort of—he would become a black sheep or people wouldn't associate with him?

DH: Oh, goodness. I don't know. That so hypothetical. I don't know. It's a possibility. Depends.

BVV: But if you do try to weed somebody out, the only way you can do it is—

DH: Physically, yeah. Or not being—safety is a big part. We've gotten rid of people on safety running into people in the air—parachuting—or running with the wind and keep smacking into the ground. Poor manipulation. Continuously maybe during chainsaw training, pretty wicked with the saw. Looks like they're maybe an accident waiting for a place to happen. So, that's a big factor too. We've gotten rid of a few people because of that. And we've given other people extra chances too. Like keep them on for a couple of weeks and let them him jump. Go back and do some more training on manipulation, try to get them to figure out what to do with the [unintelligible] when you're in the air. Give them a couple extra jumps, bit if they didn't improve that much then it's down the road.

BVV: The person you're giving the extra chance is the guy that's really trying hard to—

DH: Yeah, yeah. Yeah.

BVV: [unintelligible] training. Do you think that attitude is what sets jumpers off from other fire fighting crews? I guess, first of all, I have to have to ask, do you think jumpers are different than other fire fighting crews?

DH: Yeah. Probably not all of them. Yeah, there's a lot of IR crews that are pretty gung-ho and stuff.

BVV: What do you think sets the good ones apart from the bad ones, or the—

DH: Attitude, experience—that probably has a lot to do with it. Job satisfaction. Motivation. Physical ability. Probably those things. Lot of people on some of the crews just aren't in good shape or don't have that much experience. They don't have a real positive attitude. Like going out and busting rear for however long it takes out on fire line. Whereas most people here have a real good attitude and are pretty gung-ho—let's get out on fire; let's kick her in second gear and go for it.

BVV: [unintelligible] down to pride of doing a good job as fast as you can versus somebody that's just going to dig a line, that's just out there [unintelligible].

DH: Yeah, yeah. Well, a lot of crews—a lot of the ground crews—they take, well, a lot of them are pretty good crews. They take a lot of pride in what they do, and a lot of times they're doing different types of work. They'll be doing hot line on a fire, building a line. Then again, they're



going to be up there for a week at a time and end up mopping up and doing a lot of that too. God, the mop up is the worst part of any job. Any fire. So, you got to have good attitudes about that too. Our fires are mainly two, three day-ers and the mop up isn't that big of a deal. It's part of the job, but you can see an end in sight. Whereas on some of these large [unintelligible], you could be there for weeks. So their attitude has to be good to stay up there for that too, especially for the mop up.

BVV: I get the impression from some people that a lot of your district or IR crews resent jumpers. Do you find that true too?

DH: Oh yeah, sure. A lot of the district people, a lot of the old jumpers that are not at the F.M.O.s (?) won't call for jumpers a lot of the times. Just because...I don't know. I don't know why.

BVV: They were jumpers and they won't call?

DH: They were jumpers and now they just won't use you. I don't know whether they have a real short memory or whether they thought things fell apart once they left or what. [laughs] I don't know. "They're not like us." Yeah.

BVV: Could part of it be because, not necessarily from an F.M.O. standpoint, but from the guy on the ground or the [unintelligible], that they've got to do the mop up and you guys come in and get the initial attack or steal their fires?

DH: Oh, yeah. That's probably part of it, yeah. Stealing their fires or taking their glory or whatever. [unintelligible]. You come in with the jumping thing and it's something that's—

US: [unintelligible]

DH: Oh, go ahead.

[Break in audio]

BVV: Is there a lot of [unintelligible] to the initial attack [unintelligible]—

DH: Well, it's the most the exciting part of the fire that's for sure. Yep. Trying to stop something from running forever or trying to slow the spread down of a fire. I think that's when everybody's working the hardest that's for sure. All phases are hard, but that's probably the most exciting part of it.

BVV: I suppose the biggest challenge is...I mean, obviously, mop up's not a challenge. It's just a lot of drudge work.

DH: Yeah.

[pause]

BVV: I should have asked this question sooner, but I guess we really did—Do the people that do the weeding out and training the squad leaders or people in charge of the training, if you've only got a handful of jumpers that are involved with the training of the rookies—

DH: Yeah. Well, it's hard to say, probably four to six. Well, yeah, six to eight.

BVV: Are these all squad leaders or just some more experienced jumpers?

DH: Yeah, some are experienced.

BVV: Of all the squad leaders you have, are they involved with the training?

DH: They're all involved in some form of training. Everybody's involved this year, only we'll have to have everybody involved next year. With the rooks and with old man training too because we have two different groups. This year we had three different groups of old man training. So that takes every swinging willy you've got near. Plus, some old guys.

BVV: But it's the people in charge of training that do the reading out or whatever—the other jumpers are busy in the loft or jumping fires, they have nothing to do with the training?

DH: No.

[pause]

BVV: Okay, we're getting close to the end, Doug. [unintelligible sentence].

DH: What time do you have anyway?

BVV: This is just about four minutes past.

DH: Okay, I have some stuff to do.

BVV: Okay. What do you see is the future of smokejumping?

DH: I don't know. It'll be around for a while. Future is probably centralization and more diversification too. More doing different—doing more things. [pauses] More [unintelligible], more 20-person crew action type details, and possibly, helitack type. Anything. Anything that we're qualified for to try to sell ourselves more. [pauses] I'm sure we'll be around for a while.

BVV: Do you feel that jumpers have to sell themselves? I get the impression that jumpers sort of have this attitude that the [unintelligible] someplace is in the misty future there, and that to stay around—one reason they really bust on fires is to prove that we do a better job than anybody else, so we justify our existence?

DH: Yeah, get paid more too because that's another thing, another reason you've got to work harder and do a better job just to [unintelligible] to sell the extra money of having you on too. But it is a solid program that's for sure.

BVV: Do you feel the selling partly because jumpers feel that there may be an end coming from time [unintelligible]?

DH: Yeah. Yeah, yeah. [pauses] Not really that it ends, probably just more of a selling [unintelligible] so that people use us for whatever—whatever needs. They're starting to do so more for project work, especially—

BVV: Cutting trees.

DH: Cutting trees, doing whatever burns, burning units and stuff, so that helps. It all helps.

BVV: The last thing is, I just need the main features of your favorite war story.

DH: All I need is 20 bucks. [laughs]

BVV: What's your favorite war story—the main feature about it?

DH: Main features—

BVV: Could be pack out, could be a fire, could be a jump, or a landing or an exit, or whatever.

DH: Boy, I don't know. I'd have to think on it. I'd have to think on it for a while. I'm not sure.

BVV: It's funny that you're not the only one that hasn't been able to come up with a war story off the top of their head—

DH: Well, I can think of a few right off the top, but I don't know if it's the best. [laughs]

BVV: Because I get the impression a lot of jumpers don't go tell Joe Blow their war stories generally, but when they're in the group—the bar or whatever—

DH: They let it flow, yeah. Yeah. "Remember the time that..." [laughs] Yeah.

There was one when we were back East—it was really dumb. When the winds—the drift was about half a mile anyway, half a mile three-quarters of a mile in drift, and it was in hard woods. One guy got kicked out of the drift streamer—

BVV: You had drift streamers?

DH: Well, no, we had drift streamers. He got kicked out of the drift streamer because the drift was so much. The numbers on the plane were 1-2-Romeo [unintelligible]. He got on the ground, god, you could see the trees just blowing and bending. He made it to the ground somehow. I don't know how he did it. He got on the radio and goes, "1-2-Rodriguez, [unintelligible], there is no ground wind." [laughs] Oh, god—

He's calling back saying he's the only guy that made it to the ground. Everybody else hung up. Got hung up backwards, well, a couple got blown backwards to this tree and got lodged in a big tree of the hardwood tree up about 40 feet. [unintelligible] standing—landing up standing in top of this hardwood tree just onto a branch and his chute was draped over the side, catching a little air every once in a while. God, everybody was hanging high. But we ended up putting the fire out, and then we had to climb for everything, you know. We ended up—one guy went into a pyramid, go three bodies up to get this one last chute out. They thought that'd be pretty macho. Wrong. You never talk anybody into being the top guy. [laughs] But that was a pretty good one.

BVV: The hardwoods, are they different to jump in than the stuff around here? I mean, I would think a lot of the pine trees, they're going to have more give to them. If you come down wrong—top branches anyway.

DH: Yeah, they break a whole lot easier.

BVV: But you get the hardwoods, and I would think their branches are pretty sturdy and set. They're not going to give too much.

DH: Yeah, a lot of them, and there's a whole lot more branches too. Lot more branches. Yeah, you get hung up in one, and boy, it takes a while to get out.

BVV: [unintelligible].

DH: Yep.

That's not much of one, but it's not bad. [laughs] You had to be there.

BVV: Yeah. [laughs] Okay, thanks, Doug.

DH: Sure.

[End of Interview]