

Maureen and Mike

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**Interviewee: Richard B. "Dick" Wildman**  
**Interviewer: Charlie Bragdon**  
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Charlie Bragdon: That's your book of lies?

Dick Wildman: Yep. [unintelligible] for sure. [unintelligible] in a little bit. What it is just from when I started who was the project foremans and stuff at the time. Elmer was an assistant, and Hal was the squad leader, and Rey Zander—Rey's over on the Detroit district now. He's going to retire in September, and we're going have a retirement party up in Pendleton that I'm going to go to. Tony's back down in...he's a dispatcher out of Marana, Arizona now. [unintelligible] heads the whole BLM deal in Alaska. Skinny's retired. Then John Cowan (?), he just retired here, not to long ago. Lyle and Denny, they used to go to down to New Mexico back in the days when they used to take a couple out of each region. He's a state cop up in Alaska now. This guy is the fire staff on the Winema now. He's a ranger down on...Him and I got to be, we're still real good friends.

Well, all these guys are. You know, I kind of keep track of all of them over the years where they're all at and what they been doing.

CB: Yeah, yeah. I have a feeling that's how it will be with the guys that I that rookied with too.

DW: One of these days, we're going to have...one of these days, there's some talk that we're going to have a great big old smokejumper reunion up there at the North Cascades from all the guys who jumped out of North Cascades over the years.

CB: That'd be a kick.

DW: That ought to be a real get-together. Ed Stephens (?), I don't know what happened to him. He's a forester. Dick Neilson (?) got killed in Alaska, flying an airplane. Bill Sellers (?) is a range con down Fremont National Forest. Larry Walden, I don't know what ever happened to him. He really got busted up. Had to have a shoulder operated on. He's a range con up here on the Umatilla. Hank Moore, I don't know whatever happened to Hank. He jumped for a few years, and then he went in the Marine Corps and then he came back out. He was going to take his first jump, refresher jump, and he just couldn't handle it. He just walked back in the loft, took off his suit, left the bunkhouse, got his suitcase, and never went. That's the last time anybody ever heard of Hank. Johnny Grohl (?) went to Vietnam, lost a leg. Larry Royer (?), called him Ocean, [unintelligible].

CB: Ocean?

DW: Yeah. I don't know why. I don't know why. He got a batch of crap from that. Maybe roared like the ocean. [laughs] Hell of a story, anyway. Then, old Mike Ford (?), he's an engineer, oil engineer up in the North Sea, making, boo-coo big money. Reese Court, that's Ashley's brother. I don't know if you ever knew him?

CB: I met Ashley up here, yeah.

DW: Well, Reese, I don't know what ever happened to Reese. Do you know, Sylvia? Last time he was living across street from [unintelligible], remember?

This guy's a captain, or he was a captain years ago. [unintelligible], I seen, I don't know, maybe 10 years ago. He's a major in the Air Force. Walt Holcomb (?), jeez, I think Walt's working for a telephone company up there. Ray Rivera (?), big Mexico kid, I don't know what happened to him. He should be dead by now. He's around a few years ago [unintelligible], then had all—

I recorded what all type of jumps they were, and where they were, and who the pilot was, who the spotter was, and who my partner was, and what type aircraft, and the date over the years. [refers to his notebook]

It's kind of strange but a guy can go back through here, and you just about remember every one of them rascals. Then the 1962 season. Again, who those guys were. Who all are rookies were.

CB: Is that Howard Cooper?

DW: No, that's Fred Cooper. He's the one that...he's administrative officer on the Mount Hood, or the GP, one of the two. I seen him at a managerial grid school here not too long ago. Then Donny Fitzgerald (?), he's an FMO down on the [unintelligible] District.

CB: I met him, yeah, last year. We were on the Crescent on fire. We jumped.

DW: Then, Jack his older brother. He was a jumper. Keith also, he went jumping the next year. And then Larry Flynt (?). Larry was killed in an airplane crash someplace. Bill Furman, he's a big executive down California now. He's an FMO on the Naches Ranger District. Cecil Hicks (?) was in Alaska for a long time. Holmes is teaching school. Kleinhexel (?), he jumped just that one year, and he went in the middle of the fire and burned his feet real bad. Dropped 16 jumper, and he went right in the middle of that sucker. How he ever got out of there is just a miracle. They found him alongside the line, and of course, he was in severe shock. Took his boots off, and I guess, his toes popped open like roasted wieners, his feet was so hot. He spent long time in the hospital. Just about cooked his feet off of him. He went back. He was from up in your country someplace. Out there, up here in East Coast. He took and, nobody's ever heard of him.

Glen was, he's been a contractor around the country. Very few stories. Larry was a [unintelligible]. Old Elmo, I don't know what the heck happened to him. Roundie (?). I heard

from him for a few years, but lost him. Little Ken Taylor's a schoolteacher. This guy's a wildlife biologist over on the Wallowa-Whitman now with the Forest Service. Roy Wagner (?), he's a colonel in the whatcha-ma-call-it, now. This kid was a preacher, little Paul Wheeler. Oh, he was a super kid. Larry Zedder (?). He's round Twisp, there at Winthrop there—backhoe business of some sort.

CB: Lot of guys came out of Wenatchee, didn't they, or that area? Grew up there. Is that where you're from originally?

DW: No, I'm originally from Seattle. That's how I ended up on some of these old fires. Boy, I'll tell you, now that was a rough piece of real estate. This was a terribly [unintelligible] piece of real estate. That was right there, like those rock cliffs where there's a batch of us on there. I don't know if you know Larry Johnson, now he's a regional helicopter pilot. He dinged up a helicopter up there on that fire. Muckamuck Springs. That was a funny one. I could tell some funny stories about a lot of these things.

CB: Well, yeah, go ahead. Anything.

DW: This was a fire that...I mean, this was an airplane, Super Cub, that there was a...that we jumped in and rescued the people out of. The pilot went right to the front of it, and he was up underneath the wing. He was really severely injured in that. There was a 14-year-old boy in the back. They had a fire extinguisher mounted on the back wall, and on impact, that thing came off and hit him in the, evidently, in the back of the head. Knocked him out, but he had regained consciousness. Then he started to get on the aircraft, and his [unintelligible] was still inside. Passed out with his head down and he'd vomited. I think, if we could have gotten there sooner, we might have saved his life. But that's just a thank-you note from his parents. Also, his dad—this was a little spray [unintelligible] right underneath the aircraft there. His dad was killed a year or so later in a spray. That family was kind of disastrous.

This is some of this...C.D. Johnson, which is Kay Johnson's younger brother, he's also with the BLM in Alaska. This is myself and Ken Taylor, who was a schoolteacher, the honorable Ed Moses. I don't know what the heck ever happened to him. He was an Indian from Oklahoma, and he went back. Of course, that's Old Man Lufkin back [unintelligible].

CB: Why do you call him honorable?

DW: [laughs] Boy, that's a different story too. You can't believe that guy.

CB: Well, what? Was he—

DW: No, I can't remember too much about Ed, other than we called him the Honorable Ed Moses. Well, he was weird. [unintelligible]. Then we had another guy. What the heck? [pauses] Horrible Harry the Hungarian? [laughs]

CB: Is that Lighthorse Harry? Is that the same one?

DW: No.

CB: How did that guy get his name.

DW: I don't know. Ones they tacked on. Ended up round the loft there, some guy'd make a boo-boo, and boy, he'd get a handle tacked on him.

CB: Yeah. We had a guy cut into another guy this year with a saw, so whenever there's saw duty, he [unintelligible]. Aren't you going to take him?

DW: Then, the '63 crew was Johnny Gordon (?), Ashley Court, which he just quit last year.

CB: Yeah, I saw him up at the base. He'd got back from a jump. He's on call when needed.

DW: Oh, yeah? I'll be darned. Ken Corm (?), Watermelon Head. Steve Culbertson (?), he was a coot. His dad was the superintendent there of schools for a while. Jay Decker, he's a detective in Portland. Then there's Keith Fitzgerald. He's the FMO up on [pauses] Elum District there on the Okanogan now.

Bob Henderson, I don't know if you ever heard of that guy, but he is the one that started the international fire system.

CB: Yeah, as a matter of fact—

DW: That's the same Bob Henderson—

CB: He's coming back. He's trying to start it in the U.S., and he's contacting people in Redmond trying to get them...Friend of mine, who just graduated from forestry school, wants him to give him 30,000 bucks. Then he can be part of the corporation; he'll give him contracts. He's still doing that.

DW: Yeah, well, [unintelligible] lost their money in on him before. So, I don't know whatever happened. I can't...Boy, he had a neck that long, and it was about that big around too. [unintelligible] Adam's apple. [laughs]

Joe Lessig (?), he's FMO someplace, over here on [unintelligible]. Then, you know Pat down on Deschutes.

CB: I haven't met him.

DW: Well, you've probably heard a lot of him, but he was at Redmond for a long time. He's the air-attack boss on the same fire team as I'm on. Don McFarland, he was so skinny, he could tread water in a test tube. We called him The Stick, and then Randy Tower, which was Wally Tower's son, which used to be the regional air office. He was a good kid.

CB: Seems like a lot of families.

What was the best fire this year?

DW: [unintelligible] and Mount Baker.

CB: Which was the best fire this year? Looks like a pretty busy year.

DW: Well, let's see, '63. [unintelligible] a few jumps in '63. [long pause]

Well, there's the first one in '63. This was just a practice jump. We used to, we never got after practice jumps during the summer, unless it was really some weird thing. Like you got a new airplane in or something [unintelligible] and last year when I was 22. I don't know. Must have been a show-me jump or something, but we used to never get a practice jump. You get to in the spring, and that was it. Then you had to get fires to stay proficient. Most of my jumps, the majority of them, were all fire jumps anyway. But the '63 was 17 fires, which was pretty good. [unintelligible]. Then we used to jump a lot out of La Grande. That's when we had a satellite. We used to rotate crews down there all the time.

There's the old DC-3.

CB: Which is your favorite plane to jump out of?

DW: Probably that Skyvan. I like that better than any of them. The rest of them was out of the Twin Beechs. The Skyvan was built in Belfast, Ireland, by Short Brothers, and we had it over here and experimented with it for a year. It was a tailgate exit; it was pretty good-size aircraft—all 16 jumpers. I mean, it was a STOL aircraft, had a huge fuselage, but it was an ugly sucker, but it was really a good airplane. Had a real good platform.

CB: Stand-up exits?

DW: Yes, stand-up off the tailgate. Just really nice aircraft. Most of those days was Twin Beech or DC-3. Then we get up here and the Aero Commanders com along. Jumped a lot of those.

[flips through book] There, and here are the Aero Commanders, DC-3s and all that stuff.

Then the [Fairchild] C-119 Flying Boxcar.

CB: Was that in Alaska?

DW: No, that was right there, right there on the hill right here. There's one down on Wooley Creek on Klamath in California.

[flips through book] Redmond, see, didn't start until '74.

Here's one that was in Alaska. When the heck was that? That was '67 when I was up there. C-14 on Hess Creek. That was up north of the Arctic Circle, which is kind of weird. [unintelligible], C-119, a DC-3s. Then all, whole batch of Aero Commanders. Jumps. Even one up in British Columbia one time [unintelligible].

CB: That's pretty rare, isn't it? They don't send you up there much.

DW: No. Then here, see, is the Caribou. That was a pretty good airplane. Had a lot of them over in Vietnam. There's the Skyvan.

CB: Well, the Skyvan, you don't have any prop lass (?) then do you, if you're going out the back?

DW: No, no. Well, the Caribou we did too. But the Caribou had such a long fuselage that it wandered and wallowed all the time. You're back there, you just...when you went out, you're liable to be upside down. It was terrible matter of fact. Then you had the spot laying on that tailgate back there and look back underneath the aircraft and you got all the distortion from the wind movement. Boy, the ground was real fuzzy, like a chicken with your neck wrung off, tring to see where you was going there.

[flips through book] [unintelligible] That's the Beech 99. That's when that came along. There's the Twin Otters and Beech 99. Then it jumped to Huey helicopter [Bell UH-1 Iroquois] war times. With the military, we was doing the an experimenting. Then we had a Super 18, which was a Twin Beach, but it was a bigger fuselage, a little bit different door configuration.

CB: How did you go out of the helicopter?

DW: Just eight guys and sit right in the edge of the door, and you just—one went off one side and the another. Just string out eight of you at the same time. You had enough forward speed to trail your deployment bags, or otherwise they would've went up in the rotor system. So, you had to retain—I think we were holding about 65 knots, which is really slow compared to airplanes that we're jumping today. Most of them are up to 90 knots or 100 knots. Boy, it felt like you was going straight down. You really were. But they had to retain a certain amount of forward speed to keep them d-bags from going up into the rotor system.

Here's Aero Commander, DC-3, Beech 99. I even jumped a DC-6.

CB: Oh, I heard they tried those.

DW: Yeah. Was in on that. [unintelligible].

[flips through book] This was a real good friend of mine that he got hurt back in a primitive area and his hand off. Four of us jumped in there, back in the Pasayten Wilderness. Dark one night. Well, we got in there just at the right time because, boy, it was dark and dusty down in that gorge where we were jumping. We got in there, and we pumped him full of Demerol. Boy, he blew a thumb off up here. Kept the direct pressure on it and a tourniquet all night. Then, I never worked so hard in my life. Me...Who was all in on that? I think, Buzzard—

You ever hear of Boehner (?)? Myself, I think Moody was there too. I'd find it in here someplace, but then I'd probably only have who my partner was. Anyway, oh, we had a hard time building a hell of a spot that night. It was right down on the bottom of a great, big, deep gorge, and all the trees were as big as this table or bigger. We haul a batch of—

CB: How did he blow his hand up? Was he shooting or something?

DW: No, he worked on the same ranger district as I did when I first started. Him and I started together matter of fact, and then we lived right next door. He had a family about the same age as mine, and all our kids grew up together and our wives were real good friends. Anyway, he was destroying some old dynamite caps that he'd found this old cabin down there back in the Pasayten Wilderness. He was walking up, destroying them, and he stepped on...I mean, he tripped over a little root wad and it fell with those in his hand. When he fell, they ignited and blew his hand off, plus put shrap-metal all through his face and his chest. That was a mess. The next morning we put him in a little old G3-B, one of those little, bitty helicopter. Of course, we had strap him on the struts on the outside, and they flew him out. He had to go out over Billy Goat Pass, and that's the only time that he could...he really was conscious as to what was going on, because, boy, the rest of time we'd really kept him doped up on Demerol and stuff. Boy, I'll tell you that cold air blast at him, and anyway, this bag opened up that we had him stuffed in. I guess, the wind was going right down his shirt collar. Bob Freud (?), he said he'd never come so close to freezing to death in his life. It was late in the fall. Anyway, that was quite a deal.

[flips through book] I used to write down a lot of stuff too. I mean, a few things. [pauses] Oh. I think these guys both have gotten hurt and were off the jump list for quite a while.

Newmore (?), he was a heck of a jumper. Then this Eric Schoenfield (?), he is something else. The most intelligent man I think I've ever met in my life. That guy. Oh! What a brain. He'd been in the military for quite a number of years and was a—I think he was a major—and he'd got out and that was during the Vietnam era. When he got out, he just said. to heck with society. Just wanted to be a punk. Wanted to be a punk, and he acted one. Had an old black felt hat, and he was the weirdest looking guy you ever seen. But man! Was that sucker intelligent. I forget what college he went to, what grade point average you had have—you know, entrance



exam to get in there—but you had to be super smart to even get into that thing. A tremendous guy. Boy, he was well-loved by everybody.

Then, did you ever hear of Larry Hyde (?)? You know that kid? Him and Eric used to hang around together, and Larry's the one who was killed in a truck accident down here in California not to many, just a few years ago.

[flips through book] Alaska. Oh, I know what this was. That was when that kid was spotting. He was spotting up there in Alaska. Ashley Court was with him as an assistant spotter, and he turned around to get some drift streamers and his backpack parachute deployed, which was his spotter pack. It fell, and it was in a DC-3. It went out the door and drug him right out. Just boom! Like that, and he was gone. When he went out around the edge of that door, he just took it with him. Just tore that airplane all to pieces. So, Ashley took a bunch let-down rope and tied that door together because it was about ready to come out of those pins. If that would have come out, then it would have just tore that stabilizer right off. And the whole airplane probably would have went down. Anyway, they tied it back together, and of course, the door was damaged so bad that they couldn't drop any jumpers to assist this guy. He just drifted on down. He went out and his parachute deployed, and then he went on down. He was a schoolteacher in McCall, and I met him the first trip I went to Alaska, and really a super nice guy. But anyway, he's ended up just about a vegetable he had so much brain damage. He lived, but boy, I'll tell you, it tore him. Just about busted every bone in his body. Split, cut him from way down the back of the shoulders there some place. Just about took the top of his head off. Really made a mess out of him.

Then a year or so right after that, they had a fatality up there, that's where that guy did the let-down. I don't know if you remember that. He did a let-down out of one of those small Black spruce up there. That was one of the only fatalities we've had in the history of smokejumping. We've had two of them in over 100,000 jumps. It's way past that now. Wasn't that when I got out, but one of them was that guy that had the static line around his neck. You probably heard of that—in California. Jumped out and had an...We were experimenting with a long static line at that time—an 18-footer—and he ended up with a half hitch somehow around his neck before he left the aircraft. In which the accident started way back...that should have been caught by the squad leader. But it wasn't. Anyway, he broke his neck on when his chute deployed.

The other one we had was that guy that did the actual—I mean, this let-down. When, he hung himself, he was only a foot off the ground. He'd went through standard let-down procedure, but he didn't check all his lines. One little shroud (?) line that did a half, a loop, around his neck. He was letting down, and he got just a foot off the ground and that thing came up tight. There's no climbing back up once you're out [unintelligible]. You just can't grip them.

CB: Well, jeez. I guess they don't do let-downs enough up there that he could have remembered.

DW: Yeah, right. Then too, another thing when you'd release your harness and you leave your reserve and everything up there and your knife's on top of your reserve, and pulling off those V-rings on your britches, he couldn't get to his knife on his hip, so he just hung himself. Really weird.

CB: Crazy. [pauses] Well, I'd like to ask you some more questions, but if you want to eat dinner or something...

DW: Yeah, why don't you shut that off, and we'll eat and then—

[Break in audio]

[shuffling noise]

CB: When you come over there as their service manager, god, [laughs] we'll be ready for you over there.

So, you started jumping in '61?

DW: Yep, 1961.

CB: Let's see. Where did you work for before that?

DW: At the Winthrop ranger district, right adjacent to the jump base.

CB: How did you hear about jumping?

DW: Well, most of the...in the off season, we had a bunch of the foremen would come up and do project work all during the fall. A lot of them were the mainly the squad leaders. Old, Chet Putman and Hal Wyman, Skinny Beals, all of them used to work on the district, burning slash or whatever there in the fall. That's where you kind of got the input.

CB: So, you talked to them about it, and then decided you wanted to try it?

DW: My main reason for trying the jumping program is looking at the structure there on the ranger district. The advancement was really poor. Because there was...in those days it was—they weren't called fire management officers, they were called District assistants or DAs. They had a little bit everything. They had recreation, and they had fleet management. They had building maintenance and fire control, fire management, as we know it nowadays. But it used to be called fire control officers, even after the old DAs. But looking at the handwriting on the wall, there was another guy there that was a headquarters fireman, and he just retired here a few years ago. He eventually became the FMO of that district, and if I was to have stayed back on that ranger district where I first started, I'd probably be at the GS-7 level today. So, I just

seen no horizon and no advancement there. That was my main reason to getting into the jumping program because you start at a 5, and then you go to automatically a 6 the second year. Then if you have potential and the openings are there, you can become a squad leader and so on. Then I think you can advance on out into districts thereafter too, into assistant FMOs and at the 9 level and then on to FMOs.

CB: Did you go in for a personal interview before, or when you applied? When you got notice of the job or anything.

DW: No, well, I'll tell you. I don't know if you've ever heard of the retread program. They have it down in Region 5 in Redding. Well, at one time, almost all the bases had it. They even had it Redmond at one time. The retread program is that they would take people off the district that showed an interest. Like the year, that I started there was there was an engineer by the name of Dick Hardon, there was a forester by name Earl Kimball, there was a range [unintelligible] by name of Bill Selby, and myself. It seems to me there was about four of us retreads there at the base. I think, Selby and I was the only rookie retreads that year. We worked at the ranger district, and we went down there and took the training. Then during fire emergencies they call us back to the base, and we would come down there and jump. Every time I was called down there, I just didn't mean stand around waiting for the siren to go off. I'd going in and pack cargo chutes, or I'd do whatever needed to be done—build fire packs or anything else. That's where Mr. Lufkin took a liking to me because he's seen that I was more or less aggressive, so that fall he came and asked me personally. That was when the under structure Redmond was being developed, and he asked me to, he said, "Hey, would you be interested in becoming a permanent jumper down there with us? I think you have potential to become a squad leader," in which I went down in the next year and was rookie squad leader in '62 and a full-fledged squad leader in '63. So, I went right...My advancement was real fast and real good.

CB: That's amazing to do it that fast. Before you were a jumper, did you have a lot of fire knowledge, fire situations?

DW: No, really not that much because...Well, let's see, I'd worked on the district for three years, and I was a fire guard on 8 Mile and the Chilliwack (?). But then we were getting into quite a little bit of broadcast burning, so I had a fair knowledge of fire management and fire behavior.

CB: When you started out, did you consider it a pretty risky thing to do? How was it...How did you—

DW: Well, I'll tell you. There was quite a few sleepless nights. [laughs] I think most guys are human went through that, through that stage. However, after a couple of years, I got so I guess I depended and relied a lot more on the equipment, so therefore I got over those fears. But I'm not saying that there wasn't some to start with—

[Break in audio]

—that there isn't some fear as either lion tamer or a lying s.o.b.

CB: By becoming a jumper, that really did help your career a lot?

DW: Yeah, yeah, I think so. It really enhanced my career because I made a lot of contacts. I think one of the only things I regret that I didn't get out of it a little bit sooner and get into some other areas of fire management. Because there's—like I was mentioning earlier—there was a lot of things out here that the jumpers just don't see. Like I say, prevention programs in the those management areas and the detection systems and all. There's just a variety of other things in fire management that the jumpers don't come in contact. Basically the jumpers the smallest fire suppression. Once in a while, you get a mass jump on a large fire, but that's not very often.

CB: And you're an FMO now?

DW: Right. Well, prior to being an FMO, I was a [unintelligible] fire zone manager for four years, and they folded up the zones on the [unintelligible] and the Ochoco (?), which kind of left me without a job. Being at a high level, they had to more or less create an 11-FMO job for me. I'd eventually like to go back to the zone concept someday too, because I think that had a lot of merit in it. But the new regional forester for some of the understandings that we get from him that he likes to get back to a traditional way of doing business, and these engineering zones and these tech work centers and a lot of those things are not conducive to the management style in which he would like to have. I think he has some merit in that philosophy.

CB: When you jumped, a little bit about the equipment you had, you didn't have Nomex when you started out, did you?

DW: No, no. We had Camas (?) the first year, and then we went right to what we called the old nylon, in which we had nylon for a couple three or four years. That's when we came into the new padding also. The insulite (?) padding and the first nylon suits. Of course, they didn't have pad pockets in it. They were all held in place with Velcro; they were a mess. Also, they were very dangerous if used to land in or adjacent to a fire. Nylon clothing is very, very explosive, and they were very, very dangerous piece of equipment. Then I can't remember exactly when we went Nomex. Must have been in the late '60s early '70s is when we went to Nomex.

CB: How did that come about?

DW: Really, I don't know. That more or less came out of the equipment and the Missoula equipment development center. I'm sure that they had some of some of...I don't know where they got their value or why they started to evaluate this stuff. But then shortly thereafter, along came the fire shirts, of course, the fire pants, and everything's Nomex nowadays. But there for a long time, it was just the old blue jeans and work shirt.

NS: Yeah. Let's see, you guys had stag pants, right?

DW: Yeah, everybody used staggered britches. That was kind of a...I don't know why. I think it was just kind of a symbol here. They were supposed to tear away if you was to catch your leg stepping over a stump or whatever. [laughs] I ever seen too many guys take those dives. That was just kind of symbol, I think, of smokejumping like the White's boots and a few other things.

CB: If a guy didn't stag his pants, would someone stag them for him?

DW: Oh, yeah, yeah. Quite often they get a little hairs, maybe, some meat, shoe strings, and boots and a little bit everything else too. [laughs]

CB: Let's see...How about, did you guys carry knives on your belts like everyone [unintelligible]?

DW: No. No, back in those days, it wasn't too many big, old hip knives like we got today. Gerbers and the Old-timers. No, as I remember back, we didn't have many of those knives. I think almost everybody carried a pocketknife. Of course, then we had a reserve knife, but I don't remember that. Those folding knives is fairly new. You go back 15 years or so, and there was a whole lot of them prior to that. There was the hunting knife type with a sheath, but there wasn't too many guys that wore those.

CB: Did a lot of people smoke cigarettes?

DW: Yeah, a lot of them did. Yeah. Know a lot of them smoked the old unfiltered Camels, [laughs] which I don't know how they did it.

CB: They're the strongest. So not many people chewed?

DW: No, very, very little chewing. Very little or none. I can't remember hardly any of the guys chewing.

CB: Did you notice a change? Like now [unintelligible].

DW: Yeah, there's a lot of guys chewing. Yeah. There's just a lot of guys.

CB: And not one person at Redmond smokes, or at least admits to it. In fact, people are looked on...looked down upon, smoke, almost like that'll take away your wind or something.

Did you have two leg pockets on the jumpsuit?

DW: No, we just had single-leg pocket for a number of years. Dual leg pocket didn't come in until probably the middle-'70s or maybe early-'70s. It just seemed like the guys got to carrying

more garbage. All we used to have in that leg pocket was maybe an extra T-shirt or an extra work shirt, and that's about the size of it. Then you had your let-down rope and your helmet and your signal streamers and all that stuff. But almost all of us had the old single-leg pocket. Here you can see in that picture there is just a single-leg pocket. For a number of years, that's all we had. But then we got so, we had different radios. See, there's all single leg pockets [shows image in book]. Now they come out...Of course, the single-leg pocket was bigger than the one they have today. The ones they have today are a little bit narrower on the bottom, or at least the last suits that I built were. But we just start carrying a lot more junk. We started carrying our radios with us, and other things that required more room. But before that, the only thing...if we had a radio...Very seldom we ever had a radio on a fire, and if we did, it was a great big old pack set.

CB: So how do you carry it down, or would they drop it to you?

DW: No, they would drop it on a parachute all by itself. It was kind of a...about 12, 10-foot, 8-foot bomb chute kind of thing. Most of them was yellow in color, and it was a surplus chute, which we had lots of them at that time. They were a silk canopy also.

CB: Well, that's what happened to those guys who died in...where was the 11 guys who died and they made the movie about it. [Mann Gulch fire]

DW: Yeah, right. *Red Skies of Montana*?

CB: Their radio busted, right?

DW: I don't know really the history on that. I know my old boss Francis Lufkin got in. He was one of the investigators of that accident. I really don't remember all the particulars on it. Yeah that was in, that was out of Montana.

CB: Would Lufkin talk about that much, or try to instill the lessons he learned on that or anything?

DW: No, not that I ever recall. Francis wasn't a bragger or boaster. He was pretty conscientious and very seldom ever told any old war stories. I think of anybody had to tell, he probably had some good ones.

CB: Yeah, bet he did. Let's see. What's the chute that you jumped?

DW: Well, most of my jumps—I'd probably say the majority of them was on a 28-foot flat circular. Well, I'd say probably half of them because we were the last ones—us and McCall—to give those old canopies up. We just hung onto them and hung on to them.

CB: That was a 5?

DW: No, that was an FS-2. The FS-5a, there was an FS-5, which was a solid white, and it had some seven-foot Derry Slots in it. Then the 5a came along, which it had some 10-foot Derry Slots in it and tails. Then, of course, we came up with the FS-10, which is the parabolic, and it was multicolored, I don't even know what color they are nowadays, but the FS-2 was basically a candy-striped. I don't know the nomenclature on the old flat, circular one. Might have been an FS1, I don't know. I mean, the old just solid white one. But then they had the Eagle before that, and I don't know if they ever designated a number to that or not. But those numbers kind of came out of Missoula equipment development—the prototypes. They had a lot of those, the threes and the fours and the six and the seven that never materialized, which were kind of prototypes. They just jumped them before they ever put them out on the line.

CB: How come you guys wanted to hold on to the two and not bring in the five?

DW: Oh, I don't know. Because it was kind of mixed. I think most of...The bigger jumpers like the 5a because they felt that they could turn them, and they would turn for the bigger guys. But the littler guys, like myself, we used to be able to get away with what we call slipping or sliding the FS-2 where you grab both the side risers and pull down and tip your canopy in a attitude where if you were coming right, directly at a tree, in those days those parachute just didn't turn. I mean, they had guidelines, and you'd pull them down, and they would lazily come around. But it took quite some time before you get a 360 out of one of them rascals. So, if you were coming right straight at a tree, you'd either grab both risers in the back and pull them down as far as you could to kill off your forward speed, or you would grab both of your risers—your side risers—and slip them off to the side so it'd through your canopy up and throw it into a different attitude and you'd slide away from the tree. What we call...because they didn't turn fast. Like you guys nowadays you pull a guy...if you're coming in, you got breaks and you pull them and you throw your parachute into a different attitude. Or they turn so rapidly that you can turn away from them. In those days, if you had a big tree staring you in the eyeball, you're probably going to bite it.

CB: So, you'd just slide away diagonally.

DW: Yeah, yeah. You could just slide off to the side one way or the other. The turning wasn't all that great. They were just really slow. [laughs] We'd call that...a lot of them was known as dogs. Everybody used to have a certain number—don't pick that parachute, man, that's a real dog. Everybody was...Nowadays I don't think they even talk about that in the lofts, in the last few years that I was jumping. Everybody just took a 10 and went out, and they all turned and they all braked and they worked real nice. It. Used to be standard around the loft, you know, is don't get this or don't get that one because it just poor manipulation performance.

CB: Now, we got them with patches because there's a patch on your shoe, and you don't call it out, then you owe a keg. So everyone knows the numbers that the patches are on. That's what

gets talked about. They'll switch the numbers on the ones with the patches, so gets kind of hard.

Let's see. How about what plane were you jumping out of?

DW: Twin Beech, when I first started.

CB: You said you liked the Skyvan best of any of the planes you jumped out of?

DW: Well, here we never jumped it on a fire, but we just did an experimental up there out of Missoula. Bill Moody and I represented North Cascades, and we went over there and we got four jumps out of it. It seemed to be that the thing was the most stable and the highest performing airplane at that time and very comparable to the Twin Otter now. Although, I think, the exit and the unloading cargo and some of the other things would have been a lot better. But however, it's made by the Short Brothers in Belfast, Ireland, and the State Department could buy them for the King of Biafra and the Queen of here and there with different federal funds, but we couldn't buy them at that time to do a job out here in the field. Just the money just wasn't appropriated, so we never...so we just continued to use junk, and we're still using junk. The Twin Otter's basically a fairly good airplane, and the Beech 99, but other than those, those are the only new airplane we've ever had. All the rest of them is old military junk. However, it's going to be a long time before they'll ever replace that old DC-3 either. That was a real staple and a high performing, you know, just real good old jumpship

What's in the road for the future? I don't know. It's gonna take some money to get some decent aircraft, or they're going to have to pay a lot of it through contracts. I don't think we're going to see a whole lot until the military gets rid of some more on down the road. Maybe some of the Caribous and some of the...What's one bigger than that? The Buffalo and some of those bigger, STOL aircraft that the military have I know. I don't know.

CB: Do you remember any modifications in equipment or gear that was suggested out of Winthrop, or did you suggest it or anything like that? [pauses] On the jumpsuits or the chutes?

DW: Well, let's see. What did I...I had an employee suggestion one time, I can't even remember when it was for. [laughs] I think that was a little quick-snap on the leg pocket. You guys have them now? Some sort of a little drawstring that locks? Okay, yeah. That's what me and another guy came up with. That was one thing, and I think one of the other ones that we came up with there, was this suit-up rack. Quick suit-up rack. We developed out at the North Cascades. But basically all that other stuff came from—I don't remember any of the jump units really coming up with any design in the jumpsuits or anything. I even can't remember Missoula. It seemed like a lot of that stuff might have come from manufacturers.

CB: Okay, well, what did the drawstring replace? Was it a snap?



DW: No, just a regular, just a piece of let-down rope. You took and went around your leg and then tied into a square knot. See, that was another second or two in your suit up procedure, in which you had to tie your leg pockets.

CB: We're still using our quick suit-up rack. It's pretty neat little—

DW: Yeah, we'd developed that up there. Oh, and there's a lot of little modifications, just little modification. Like on the helmets, the Velcros and lots of different things—minor things that we experimented with. For the face mask, we had some Velcro locks, and I don't know what they've got now.

CB: Instead of a snap?

DW: Yeah, instead of the snaps. They didn't really work all that well because if you got a line underneath them, they'd fallen apart. Just a lot of little things like that.

Give me one second. [walks away]

CB: If you found something you thought was better in some of the equipment like with the leg pockets, could you just go ahead and put it on there, or did you have to get approval from somebody or?

DW: A lot of that stuff, now, like that leg pocket thing—that wasn't really anything dynamic or any life-supporting thing. We could make small modifications like that, but anytime we'd get into structural design of any of the parachute components like the tray board (?) or the D-bag or any of that stuff, certainly you couldn't do that.

CB: Oh, I think I'll ask you about rookie training. I'd like you describe a typical day a rookie training, or maybe the worst day that you can remember.

DW: Well, they were all hard for me. I never was the running type. Therefore. I usually brought up the end of the pack, but the rest of the calisthenics I could hold my own, or matter of fact, I think I might have been just a little bit better than most of them because I had upper body strength. But the running, it killed me for the 14 years that I stayed in that outfit. I just never, never was built for it. But rookie training was just plain mean. I think back in those days, we weren't prepared, and maybe they aren't today either, but it seems like you were selected and there was nothing said other than unless you really visited with the guys—some ex-jumpers or something. I think a majority of them just came cold. I know a lot of them we used to get in the rookie program would come right straight out of sitting at a desk for nine months at school, and then it'd just be murder on them for the first week. I think now that information's getting out, and I think guys are getting into a lot better shape prior to. Of course, we didn't have the strength and agility test at that time either. That didn't come into being until...I don't know, '75, '74, somewhere along in there. Therefore, I don't think we washed out as many people. As long

as a guy could go through that full hour of calisthenics twice a day. One thing I think we did up there, it didn't make any difference how hot or anything else, we was still out there doing them. I think nowadays, I think, they have some days or some temperature things when it gets up to 95 or so; they go out and they may run for a shorter run and do some light stuff, but they don't exert themselves like we used to have to do.

CB: Were you there when they made the change from boots to running shoes? You could run in your—

DW: I might have been there one year. I can't even remember the. Seemed like I always ran in my boots. I think, yeah, when they first come out with that agility test, you could wear your tennie-runners. I would have had to pass it, because I couldn't made it in my boots on, I'll tell you.

CB: So, you would spend the whole day doing let-downs in and exits in your suits.

DW: Yeah, we'd get suited up there. Like I said, if it was an 8 to 5, we'd start right at 8:00, and we'd get suited up and we'd go out. I can't remember which one we went to—the let-down or the manipulation tower or the shock tower or whatever—but we'd spend all day in that suit. Other than the two hours that we were in the physical fitness and the hour after lunch in which we had first-aid. All the rest of time that was before all the slide tape series came along.

CB: Did the old men give you a lot of grief when you were a rookie?

DW: Not so much me because I lived off base. I was a local jumper there, and I went home to my family every night. But the rookies that did live there, yeah, they just, it was murderous for those guys. The old jumpers just harassed them and just really laid it onto those poor guys for years. I think it was kind of traditional around there, and I don't know if that's changed or not. I think it has some; I think people's just grown up a lot more and got a lot more mature and a lot of those things have slid by the wayside. I'm not sure, but it seems to me the last year or so I was there, there wasn't as much as there was in earlier years.

CB: Well, what was some of the...I'd like to get to hear some of these so that if I'm here next year I can give some rookies some grief. [laughs]

DW: Well, you take a rookie that's been out there all day and busting his can, and then some guy'd come down the hall and throw a rattlesnake in his room. Keep him up on his bunk and awake all night, he wouldn't be physically fit for the next day. Oh, run up and down the side of the barracks with a broom—brrrrrr—on that old, corrugated steel. Open the window and hose them down in their beds, and just all kinds of things. Oh, they had a thousand things they could do to them rookies. They wouldn't let them walk through the...They had to go out the back door and around the bunkhouse. They wouldn't let them walk through the end where the old jumpers were in. Of course, they couldn't set on the first couple tables in the mess hall; they

had to go back in the corner. They had a thousand of them, but I never really got involved in that too much.

CB: They had a special path to walk to get to the mess hall too or something?

DW: Yeah, well, I think they walked the same path. I can't remember a lot of those things, but there was a lot of them.

CB: So, in your rookie class...Oh, I just remembered another one. Did they ever—I heard somewhere that they drank, they'd come and drink Kool-Aid while the rookies were doing their exercises.

DW: Oh yeah, yeah. Oh yeah. They'd come out there, and they'd give the instructor a glass and stand in drink them. Come down from the mess hall and drink that stuff and all kinds of things. And some rookie'd get smart, and they'd put him probably in an old k-pop (?) bag and tape him to a telephone pole out there. Like a mummy in a mummy bag, and then maybe stick a water hose in if he started getting real hot and fill the bag up full of water, let it dribble out around his neck. They had all kinds of things.

CB: Usually, if a rookie tried to give it back, he was dealt with pretty quickly?

DW: Oh yeah, yeah. The old jumpers pounced on him right now.

CB: Where you there when Willy Lauden (?) was a rookie?

DW: Yeah, yeah. Bill Lauden? Yeah.

CB: I heard he gave a lot of to...he gave a lot of it.

DW: Yeah, and I think he probably suffered quite a little bit for it too. I'll tell you though, Charlie, I think that that changed quite a little bit at one period in time, and that was when we was starting to get a bunch of Vietnam vets. Those guys that'd had a bunch of that crap in the service, and they'd had a bunch of it in the Special Forces, and they had a bunch of it over there in Nam. When they came back, there were some big bruisers. I think it kind of toned down there for a few years because those guys, they had kill in their eye. I think some of these guys kind of...Used to be just a certain amount of them old jumpers would pull that crap too. It wasn't all of them because there was a lot of nice guys, but there used to be the rabble rousers—the ones that was stir it up.

I think there, I remember one year, and it was when one Marcotte and Christianson and a bunch of big scrapping rooks came, was there. They'd all come back from Vietnam, and they'd had all that hoop-rah bullshit that they wanted. I think the tables turned a little bit about that time. That was about the time I was leaving the program, but I seen a change then and I don't

know if it's continued that way or not. But I'd say for the good. I used to get a little bit disgusted with those guys throwing people in the goddamn creek and this and that. As it ended, a hell of a lot of them was off the jump list because of some stupid ass injury that they'd obtained playing grab-ass. Foul play after...off-duty and wrestling with rooks or whatever. It just caused a lot of guys to miss some jumps. It's just not healthy.

CB: Were you ever in on the training of rookies?

DW: No. Very, very little. The only time I ever went out into the training area would be if one of the other squad leaders, the training foreman, or whatever, if one of those guys'd become ill or were on an assignment or something like that. Basically, I took care, because I was a loft foreman, that was my principal duties was in there. I think basically they're all set up that way now too. They have a loft foreman and a training foreman, and the foremans usually pick their training cadre. Then I had, all the years I was up there, I had Maynard Buzzard, in which Buzzard didn't get involved in the training that much because I had him in the loft a lot of the time.

CB: To me training seemed like some kind of a test or something. What do you think they're trying to test, or who are they trying to weed out by that rookie training?

DW: [pauses] Oh, I don't know if I follow you.

CB: Well, some people were able to do the minimums. We had a minimum run and a minimum—

DW: Sit-ups and pull-ups.

CB: But there's some people that seemed to me that they were worked on or something just to a certain extent to see if they would break or something like that. And then some of them did.

DW: Well, I was around for first couple years of that strengthening and agility testing, and we had a couple of guys that was a little slow, simply, mainly because they were so out of shape when they came there. Actually, I had sympathy for them because they were going through some real pain, and those guys were really pushing on them. Looking back now, I think it was kind of unjust. I think maybe they should've give the guy another week to get in better shape and continued on with his training or something because I think the majority of them would've made it that did wash out. What few that we did wash out. Then there's a couple of them too that just couldn't handle it, in which that's the way the cookie crumbles.

CB: Well, okay. Well, who is it that rookie training is trying to weed out?

DW: I really didn't...I never did really see that they were trying to weed out other than...maybe the weaker, the weaker one. I think it was mainly stemmed around the strengthening and agility, whether you could hack it or not.

CB: Do you think rookie training was adequate preparation for jumping?

DW: For the jumping itself?

CB: For the whole entire job is what I'm referring to.

DW: Yeah, I think so because I've been in fire management game. This is my 24th fire season, and I think if a guy is in good physical condition...I've matched when I've been on some big fires and what with 16 or 24 or 32 jumpers, and we've had a flank and there's been a suppression crew or a Forest Service regular crew on the other flank. We just work their cans right off; there's no comparison.

[Break in audio]

—because I see this on large fires. I think those IR crews are exceptionally good. Each one of those guys knows his niche in that organization, and those guys I've watched them on Mortar Creek. You drop off an IR crew. Down over the hill they go. They've got their saw man, and they put out a lot of line in a day. You drop a Forest Service regular crew off on the other ridge doing the same job, and you look at the end results at the close of business that night, as I fly by in a helicopter or something, and there's no comparison. I think the jumpers is a same class or even...Well, I don't think they can really compete with the IR crews because they're not trained in progressive fire-line building like the IR crews. However, because of their physical stamina, they can give them a good tussle. I think that'd be correct.

CB: How many jumpers start in rookie training when you did?

DW: Oh, I think there's about 15. We used to average, I think, around 10 or 12 up there, something like that.

CB: And how many made it made it through?

[long pause]

DW: There's 15 that year, and all of them made it through. However, just looking at that list of names, there's one that should have been washed out. There's two of them that should have been washed out.

CB: But why weren't they washed out?

DW: Simply because we didn't have the strength and agility test then. As long as you could...if you could muscle through that hour of P.T. in the morning and that one in the afternoon, and you were basically competent in your chute manipulation and other things, you made her. But

there's a couple of guys, I look back here now...well, this guy, he was so clumsy, he broke his leg on the second jump and that ended his jumping career. Holby (?), never...well, he jumped four or five years, and he never was a jumper in my book. Nice guy, but he just wasn't jumper material. The rest of those dudes, pretty skookum guys.

CB: Did you find that it's...How long did it take for a rookie to be able to work into rigging and sewing and the jobs besides bull cooking in the loft?

DW: On an average, two to three years. Of course, we trained them all, I think, in cargo chute packing and stuff. But a guy kind of...that's where we usually weeded them out was just watching him pack cargo chutes. Loft foreman or whoever, assistant loft foreman. If you seen a guy going up through there, and he just slopping them cargo chutes together and really didn't care about that loft job, much rather been on down in the saw shack or someplace else, that's usually where they got. Because even the cargo chutes to me, is if you get the jumper there, you want to get his supplies to him. You want a dependable piece of equipment. So whenever I got guys in there and I seen they was pretty sloppy on rigging cargo chutes. I just figured well they'd never make a rigger, a personal pack. So, e kind of weeded those guys out, and the guys and really showed a desire to be in there and had a lot of questions and enthusiastic and wanting to sew, those are the type that we kind of drifted towards the loft.

CB: Well, what were some of the jobs that rookies would do until they got to go into the loft or the sewing room. Was there—

DW: There was a lot of things that rookies could do like simple little map cases and all kinds of little sewing jobs that you could line them out on, and if they had the type of sewing skills at all, they could put those together. Just depended on their workmanship, if they were plumb sloppy, then you kind of weeded them out of the loft; if they showed a real desire and their seams were straight, then you kind of kept on to them.

CB: Was there any jobs that were just invented just to take up time for them?

DW: Oh yeah.

CB: Like bullshit jobs.

DW: Oh yeah. We always had those. The rock pile. Move them here one day, move them there the next. I think every base has those. But all I'd have say too, there wasn't that many of them. Most them was details that had to be accomplished and had some sort of objective, and they just weren't make-do. Another thing, I think we all realized that one thing the old man stressed was by golly a day's work for a day's pay, and sometimes you just had to do them odd jobs.

CB: Can you describe what your initiation?

DW: Well, we never had an initiation. I guess they did—or at least I never participated. I don't think, I can't remember if they did have initiation for the rookies in. But I know it followed there a few years later, and some of them got pretty raw, just some damn childish junk as far as I was concerned. It sure as hell shouldn't have been things that grown men was doing. From what I understand down in the loft. Like I said, I lived off base all the time, and I left my job and I went home to my family. But hearing some of the things around the loft, I thought is pretty childish for grown men to be pulling on one another.

CB: How about the night before your first jump? How'd you prepare for your first jump?

DW: Well, I can't remember that far back.

CB: I mean did you go out and get ripped?

DW: Oh no. No, no, I just went home. Everybody's got those knots in their stomach and diarrhea the next morning and whatever else you might get. [laughs] But I think at that time, I was probably a little more mature because I was 25 years old when I went through my rookie training, where a lot of them was 18, 19, 20 year-olds, too.

CB: Yeah. Well, what did you...Did you celebrate afterwards after your jump?

DW: No, not that I can recollect. I don't remember that much celebrations. We used to have some good, fun parties and stuff later on in the season, but I don't remember ever...I never participate in going out and getting toilet-hugging drunk.

CB: More when you guys visited other bases, did you find there was a pretty good rivalry going between you and the other bases like you came down to Redding or something like that? Was there a rivalry when you guys get out on fires to see who could—

DW: Yeah. There was always that old *esprit des corps*, and who's gonna produce the most out there. As far as rivalries, I don't think we really had that many. I know it seemed like later on, in the late '60s, early '70s, there used to be a lot of that stuff and that kind of initiated, I think, at Cave Junction. There got to be a lot of thievery among jump bases, and I thought that was pretty childish too. They used as steal one another's plaques and this and that crap. One time they even stole the wooden Indian from the drugstore there in Redmond, hauled it down to Cave Junction, and that just gives the town people in the community a sour outlook. That's pretty damn childish, again, and is uncalled for—things like that.

CB: I noticed they have a chain on them now. They're chained down to a big weight.

DW: Yeah, but that's some of the reasons, and that's uncalled for.

CB: How about between Helitack repellers, in general, because some people consider that a threat to jumping?

DW: Yeah, I kind of got that feeling. I never really did get that involved in it, but there used to be some competition. especially in the early '70s when all the helicopters showed up. They had 52 helicopters in the region at one time on contract. They was on every hill. Then it started not only getting competitive, but it also started getting dangerous because there was a lot of times when I'd pull into a fire with a load of jumpers and just be on the final run after I dropped my streamers and all at once a helicopter would appear in the drop zone. Things like that started getting pretty competitive. One of you had to pull off, which we always did or at least I did when I was spotting. But as far as on the ground, I think there some competitiveness there too as to who could dig the most line. I think that's good and healthy. I don't see anything wrong with that, but it's still, I don't think we want to get in a hurry and start sacrificing safety for some things that for some things that...*esprit de corps* type things, 'I want to be there first or.'

CB: Did you guys get paid hazard pay?

DW: No For, let's see, when did hazard pay come in? Oh, when did H-pay come in? I can't even remember. Must have been along in the late '60s—that H-pay. It was in the late '60s, I'm sure. But before that, years ago when I first started, when I was working on the district, we used to have what we called...what the hell was that called? Talking about it the other day when I got it. Oh, we had a kind of a 25%...I can't remember what we called it. But it used to be just regular old straight time for a long time, and then got time and a half, and then, now, you get H-pay. I think you get H-pay for quite a few things. When we first started jumping, it was just mainly for fire suppression. Now, I think you get it for snag falling and quite a few other things, which...Tree climbing is another one. A lot of those things.

CB: You didn't have standby pay then either?

DW: No, no. Well, no, if you wanted your jump...There was lots of times when I'd stay down there on my days off, if I was top of the list, and if you want to jump, you had to sit there on your own time and if siren went off, and then you could go back on the payroll. But a lot of times a lot of guys sat around there if they was top of the list and their days was off. They weren't getting paid unless we had a going fire.

Is it still that way today?

CB: Well, at Redmond, they won't let you. If it's your days off, you can't jump, but they still do it up at Winthrop. I don't know about La Grande. I think La Grande, you can too. You can't hang out and wait for it to happen. They'll call you if there's a trip, or if you're there for a trip, which is...I don't know. I think might be good to have it where if you want to hang out, you can.

What would you do in the off season when you weren't jumping?



DW: A little bit everything. Mainly, I worked in the timber system. Marking, cruising form classing (?), grading, and that type of stuff on the old Pasayten district and then the Winthrop Ranger District for number of years. And a lot of years, we worked on trail maintenance right after we still had a lot of nice fall days. We'd o back in the Pasayten Wilderness Area and build bridges. I did a lot of work on the Crest Trail, which was just constructed in the late '60s and early '70s. I worked up there on that for a number of falls. Just a lot of different projects. Did a lot of thinning, thinning and pruning in the off-seasons in the early years, which they don't prune anymore. Of course, all the thinning is on contracts now, but those are some of the things we used to do.

CB: Well, when did you feel like that the rookies were accepted as old men?

DW: I think they were pretty much accepted and part of the pack after their first fire jump. Of course, we used to match them up with the old jumpers, and I think they probably still do the same thing today. I think when they came back, and everybody'd listen to their great big war story—and rookies always the biggest one—[laughs] it used to be quite fun. But I think from that day forward, they were accepted as an honorary jumper and one of the boys.

CB: How did your base get along with the people in town there in Winthrop?

DW: Fairly good. I think community was real supportive to the smokejumper organization, and most of the jumpers were pretty good in the community. Used to get your hot dogs once in a while that'd get up in the tavern, get a few—them big hairy ass smokejumper—but usually there was a few of the older guys that would calm him down. Matter of fact, I used to shut my guys off on some fires because they have a tendency—especially if a ground crew came in and you get mixed on the guys, and especially the newer jumpers—they'd start in a war story-ing it. Then a lot of times I'd just go up and tell them to knock the bullshit off, when they get down behind the ranger station on the way home and then we can tell our big windys. Let's get the job done first in.

I think that kind of sours people too. I mean, other people to a certain degree. These guys going around with a big chip on his shoulder, thinking they're the biggest and the toughest and the meanest [unintelligible]—

CB: Well, I tell you that I've only been doing it two years and I really love the program, but if you get around, if you get too many jumpers together for too long, they're gonna start talking about how great they are.

DW: Yeah, yeah, right. Right. Yeah,. That's what I mean. And there's somebody usually have to have a cool head and tell them to knock it off or shut it up and take it out behind the barn.

CB: Did the jumpers at your base see to a lot of each other in the offseason, or were they working together on project work most of the offseason?

DW: Yeah. Well, there wasn't too many, and most of the kids back in those days, most of them were pretty conscientious about going to school, and most of them stayed right with it. But then in the early '70s, hell, we had a lot of them, we just classified as jump bums. All they'd do is jump in the summer, and then as soon as the snow hit in the wintertime, they'd grab their skis and away they'd go—Colorado here and there and all over. That's all they did is jump and fun. But it used to be that old bunch, that by golly, they needed every nickel they could get to go through school. Probably the first from the '60s through the '70s there, and then after that, we get kind of different breed of cat.

CB: In the '70s?

DW: Yeah, yeah.

CB: In the '60s, did it...was there—? I guess the question I'm asking is, did a war have any effect on the jumping program? Vietnam War and people's attitudes, or the people available for the job? Was there a disagreement—was there the long hair, red neck confrontation?

DW: Oh yeah, yeah. That was there. Of course, where wasn't it in that era? There was definitely that there because there was a whole batch of us all red-neckers. I really was never that way that much, but boy there were some guys that sure as hell was. Boy, I'll tell you. Came rookie training, he'd better be clean cut, or out behind the loft they went with a batch of scissors and a batch of the old jumpers. But, yeah, that was a different era altogether. [laughs]

CB: Did you get a lot of jumpers out of the service then, paratroopers?

DW: Well, we never really got too many. We got a lot of guys coming back from Vietnam out of the service, but there wasn't really too many of them that was paratroopers. Darn few of them. The thing is, it was kind of tradition there for a long time, hell, if you got an application from a skydiver, you just automatically [unintelligible] filed it. If a guy is going to put in an application, don't tell us you're some big, hairy-ass skydiver with 534 jumps because those type, especially that the first bunch, man, they used to be reckless. They had some of the ragged-est old equipment you ever seen. Almost all of them is old war surplus, and you could pick up paper any given weekend and see where a couple of them augered (?) in. But those type were real hard to convert to smokejumper training because they had their own styles, and they were going out and kipping, and then they were going out and spread-eagles. Once they developed that pattern, it's pretty hard to develop them the way we want them to exit an aircraft. Therefore, that's why we didn't really do too much with the skydivers.

Now the Army guys, a few paratroopers we did, there's just a couple little minor changes we had change with those guys because basically their program and their exit procedures were very similar to ours.

CB: Okay. I want you to try to remember any special words that were used around the loft that weren't used in other places. Say, what would a word be for somebody who was a geek, or just somebody you didn't feel should be jumping, or maybe just messed up on one fire or something just recently? Would they have a special word for that?

DW: Not to my knowledge. I can't...I don't remember really ever blackballing anybody.

CB: Oh, I didn't mean blackball.

DW: Well, I mean, yeah...I mean classifying them because of...Oh, some of them...like I said, and then a lot of them ended up with nicknames in over stupid little things. Like that one guy I was telling you about being a fire staff down on the Willamette, now, Danny Martin (?). Well, back in those days, we used to play baseball a lot after work at night. I guess some of the stories go that he showed up, a rookie, and they were going to have ballgame. Of course, back then, they didn't have the Adidas and Nike's. You just had the old tennie-runners. Everybody'd put them on, and he come running out of the bunkhouse with a pair of regular baseball cleats. Hell, they give him that handle; they called him Cleats for a number of years. just simply because that [laughs] one little thing that he did there. Hell, he thought everybody should wear baseball cleats, I'm sure. He come out there. But I can't think of anything.

CB: Well, how about some other nicknames and how they were gotten?

DW: Well, [unintelligible] stick, that's just because he was so skinny. Like I said, he could tread water in test tube—that guy. How he got through rookie training, I don't know. He is a tough little guy though. Holt, now, we had to have a handle for him, but I can't remember what it was. [long pause] Ocean. Yeah, I can't remember—

CB: Ocean. How did he get his name?

DW: Well, [laughs] evidently, he'd gone out with some gals—rotten few bugs in the country—and anyway he ended up with a great big dose of crabs, and he said they were, something about 'roaring like the ocean.' Anyway, that's where he got his handle. They called him Ocean for a long time. Matter of fact, the old slab goes out from the gas house is still—when they poured that slab, he was in on the pouring of the cement. His name's still in that slab—Ocean. [laughs] Also, he went down to Redmond. He got canned over that deal, but he—

CB: Because he wrote his name in it?

DW: No, no. That was because he went down there, and they got into...I don't know if you ever heard. Well, you know the '86 Club—the '86 Corral out there? Well, that used to really be the going place. Anyway, I guess you got in there one night, and he was the nicest guy in the world too but boy, what alcohol does to some of these guys. Anyway, he got all drunk up, and he pulled out his old wang (?) and then he pulled one pocket. He pulled out his dong, and he was walking around the dance floor hollering, "Look at the one [unintelligible]. Look at the one [unintelligible]." [laughs] Anyway, they arrested him for indecent exposure, and the old man canned him. [laughs]

There's been a lot of, quite a few deals like that too. I can't remember them all. I'll tell you, you probably get a bunch of us old jumpers together, we'd come up with a whole batch of things like that because McCabe and Pino and a lot of them guys—there's a million that went on. But trying to think of them all.

CB: [laughs] I've heard of that one, yeah.

DW: That was Ocean.

CB: Let's see. What would you call a big fire burning fast, lots of hot line on it?

DW: Oh, we just kind of referred to them as barn burners. I don't know what they call them nowadays.

CB: How about jumpers who were always inside in the loft? Never got outside. I mean, they did, but that was the impression you got.

DW: Well, if there was any talk about that there, it was never mentioned. Not that we can remember. Because almost all guys showed different aptitudes for different things, and some guys like the saw shop and some liked the warehouse and some liked the loft. We pretty well put them where they showed the most interest.

CB: Well, like at Redmond, they call them loft rats. I mean if you're just rigging all day.

DW: Oh yeah, yeah. Oh, yeah.

CB: It's not like it's derogatory, but it's like—

DW: Oh, yeah. You're known as loft rat, yeah.

CB: Did you—

DW: And bat cave-ing it. You've heard of that. That's where guys are hunkering. Hell, like like that old Quonset hut up there and the loft. Well, used to be all them old bins, and a jumper go

in for—back in those days, we used to go seven days a week 16 hours a day if it was needed. During '70, that's exactly what we did. I don't think I had a day off all last summer as I remember right. There was a lot of times you just rummy; you just walking around a zombie because you just hadn't had the rest. Then you get some jumpers that would crawl off in a hide hole, and you would call them bat cave-ing it. Cripes, I remember this one kid one time—I looked and looked and looked for him. Found him back there in the sleeping bag bin. Hell, he heard me coming, see, and if he'd just shut his eyes, I'd never seen him because I looked back in this dark hole, and all I could see is the whites of his eyes back it in there. [laughs] So I had him.

CB: Well, tell me more about that year 1970.

DW: Oh, '70. 1970. Let me look here in the book. Bringing back some memories. All I know is it just seemed like it never ended. We had—just that state of Washington, we loved to burnt that rascal up. It just seemed like there was one project fire after another. I mean, not just one going, but several of them. That whole Wenatchee country was on fire at one time. Like I said, I think we had 190-some jumpers as I remember right working on that base. We even brought them down from Alaska then, which that was some rough stuff bringing those guys down because most of those guys had been trained in Alaska, and their terrain is one hell of a lot different than ours. Boy, bringing them down there and showing them that North Cascades, now, they'd get a little on the nervous side. I kind of felt uncomfortable dropping a lot of them in that tall timber especially when they weren't used to tall timber and let-down procedures and things like that. But it was kind of a mean year.

CB: Or just pick out one of those fires that was—if you can remember it.

DW: Well, I remember probably that one of the scared-est times I've ever been, and that was on the Slide Ridge fire. They called up there, and...I forget. There was an old ex-jumper or someone off of our force that was familiar with jumper operations on the overhead team that requested us. Anyway, it was a real large, large fire up the whole Entiat Valley, and they wanted us to come down at daylight in a DC-6...DC-3. They wanted us to jump four different heli-spots along this ridge and construct them so they could get men in there above it to build line. So, they dropped us in there, and it was fairly early morning. The fire, of course, had laid down quite a bit during the night and was relatively quiet; although, it was still burning briskly in some places. But then that afternoon as the old day in the canyon heated up, boy, that sucker got to roaring down there. Of course, miles of fire down below you and real steep, craggy and heavily timbered. We were up on these little side ridges. Now, I had four jumpers with me, or three with me, and we had four different teams building these heli-spots. Anyway, what an incentive to build a heli-spot in one hell of a hurry because, boy I'll tell you, that sucker would roar. You'd see this huge smoke column right below you just coming up the hill. There wasn't really any place to go because we were on these little side ridges, and it was just cliffs and rocks and more steep terrain up ahead of us. Of course, we had radio communications, and there was helicopters on standby to get us out of there if we needed to. I was off to the side monitoring the radio or had someone monitoring it at all times, and we were flat cutting out—cutting heli-

spot. We had quite a bit of cutting to do, and I know the other teams were doing the same thing. But every once in a while that thing would 'whoof' up and make a big hairy run down there, and that really made us nervous. I'll tell you, I don't think I ever built a heli-spot so fast in my life, and there was a lot of work there to do. That was one time I was a little on the nervous side.

CB: Okay, let me change the tapes here.

[Break in audio]

CB: —some kind of break. He's attached to it.

DW: Like I say, old Bill, goddamn, he's got some potential. If he'd just get out there and use it. He really has a—hell, he could become one hell of a good fire staff man because he's got a hell of a good head on him, and he's ambitious and sharp as a tack and a hell of a good trainer. That's what he ought to be in this region is the regional training officer. But he just has to keep them old jump boots on. I still think he could—I think he could still jump and do some of them other things. Get around in the testing equipment and things like that. Darn, it's a shame because he's a good man old Bill is.

CB: Did you guys have a jumper fund you could borrow from?

DW: Yep.

CB: What was the rules for it?

DW: Really wasn't any rules.

CB: How much did you have to pay into it at the beginning of the year?

DW: We didn't have any. No, I don't remember as you ever had to pay in anything. [pauses] Let's see, how did we develop that thing? Through the sales of pop or some stupid thing. We built up a kitty, and then the jumpers—especially the new ones, when they came in the spring right out of school, most of them would be flat-ass broke and couldn't make it to the first paycheck. We used to stabilize those guys, and that's what it was mainly for. Then I think about the time I was getting ready to leave there, they got into things like so much a jump, or so much for goofing up on a jump, I should say. I think those funds went into the jumper fund too. I don't know, but I think it's a good deal because there's a lot of those guys that need that assistance when they get there on the job.

CB: Well, thanks for the tea (?). That's really—

DW: I know a lot of times I'll ask these young guys that's working for me, "Hey, you got enough to buy groceries? You need 20 bucks; you need 50 bucks?" I'm willing to offer it right out of my own pocket because I've never had a bad apple yet.

CB: Yeah. Would you guys bet on who would get closest to the spot?

DW: Oh yeah. Yeah. That used to be—

CB: Put a dollar in the kitty is that what you—

DW: Yeah, whatever—four bits or two bits back in them days. There's a little bit of money then. [laughs] I can't remember. Most of them was four bits it seemed to me like.

CB: Was there anybody who would always win it?

DW: Yeah. There was one guy that if he was going to jump that day, you didn't get in the pot with him. His name was Ben Hall, and he's a special agent up on the Mount Baker-Snoqualmie...or no, is he in Wenatchee now? I can't keep up with him. Super nice guy. He jumped for a few years, and then he went—he came out the Navy, jumped a few years, and then he went into the...He was a Federal Bureau of Investigation [FBI]. Now, he came back to the Forest Service as a special agent. But that guy had depth perception like you couldn't believe. I mean, he wasn't an old, old jumper. From his first rookie jump, that sucker was good. He could just—his depth perception, his manipulation was just perfect. If that guy was in on the jump, you didn't get in the pot unless you wanted to just give him four bits because that sucker'd take it every time. I'd say 90 percent of the time he did anyway, or at least as I recollect.

CB: Did you get a rookie pin then?

DW: Yeah, yeah. A little pair of wings with a little green tree on it, yeah.

CB: When would they give that to you?

DW: After the first season. At the termination, yeah. Well, we never had termination parties in those days. Let's see, when did that start? Termination parties, I think, started about maybe in the late '60s. But I can't remember any of them before that.

CB: When you got your 50 or 100 or 150, did you have to buy a keg?

DW: Yeah. Yeah, that was pretty standard procedure too.

CB: So, when you buy your keg, would you have it at a baseball game, would you have it at a party or—

DW: Usually at a party, or a lot of times it wasn't known as a keg everybody'd just show up at the bar. I know on my 50 or 100 or 150 somewhere along in there, we was having— everybody up to the tavern. Nothing was going on; I mean, nothing was going on. So, everybody split for the tavern, even the pilots. Boy howdy, the old man got a telephone call, needed some chutes, cargo chutes, rigged or something for Cave Junction or someplace that was running out of cargo chutes, and he came looking for us. He couldn't find the jumper except they're all parked in front of the tavern. [laughs] Boy, I'll never forget the old man bolting through that door just like Paul Bunyan about two big steps, and he was plumb in the back of the tavern. Boy howdy! Oh man, I'll tell you! You could've heard a pin drop in there. [laughs] He sure got a hold of us the next morning, but we all kind of stuck together. The old man kind of—goddamn, he was a good old man. He kind of admitted he was wrong; we kind of admitted we was wrong. Then he came out and got us all squad leaders together later on, and he said, "Okay guys, let's get back to work. You're too goddamn good a crew to be pouting about this, so let's go." Everybody just buckled down and got right with it.

CB: If a guy had a hole in his shoes—

DW: Goddamn, I wonder if you could get a ride back with them jumpers.

CB: Yeah, but they're going to La Grande.

DW: Oh, they're out of La Grande? Oh.

CB: If it's Cooper. Isn't it Cooper?

DW: No. Guy by the name of Williams.

CB: No, not out of Redmond. I guess he's out of La Grande or McCall or something.

DW: Let's find out.

CB: Well, I know he isn't out of Redmond.

DW: Only take me a second.

CB: Yeah. I was talking to a guy at work yesterday and he said nobody went out from Redmond.

DW: Maybe they were out of La Grande.

CB: If a guy had a hole in his shirt—a little hole—

DW: Wear hole, tear hole, rip hole. [laughs]



CB: [laughs] That was one of the funniest things I've ever seen, just rip his shirt off right there.

DW: Yep, wear hole, tear hole, rip hole. The way it went.

CB: I was on this IR crew, and this guy was walking down the street. We're just walking into dinner, and somebody goes—I wasn't aware of this tradition or something—somebody goes, "Hey, look the rat's got a whole new shirt."

So, they got about three guys, and then [makes tearing sound]. That was no matter what kind of shirt it was?

DW: Yeah, hell, it didn't make any difference. I've been in bar with that stupid McCabe, and he'd get a few beer in him and reach over get your cigarettes out of your pocket. If he felt like it, he'd just take the whole shirt pocket off right with a pack of cigarettes. Rip! Then, rip! Then, rip! Then pretty soon nobody'd have any shirts on.

CB: Do you guys give a lot of tours up there at Winthrop, didn't you?

DW: Yeah, yeah. Lots of them. Lots of them to the public.

CB: Was that a job that people wanted, or did people try and shy away from it?

DW: Oh, there again you had guys that—you could tell ones that really didn't want to do it and then you could tell the ones that did want to do it. If you was going to put on a tour for someone, I thought that you should get somebody that is going be interested and take them through and do a good job of it. I think overall we did a pretty good job of that. We had a lot of people come through there. I'm sure at Redmond, I understand lots of school classes come through there.

[long pause]

CB: Yeah. In the '60s, was there a lot of fights at the taverns and stuff?

DW: No. No. No, there never was much fighting downtown. Oh, once in a great while a guy, a jumper, would get some guy's girlfriend and be a little scuffle, but not a whole lot of that either.

CB: Well, I guess what I want to ask you now is if you can just...[laughs] Some people say that jumping is the most fun that you can have with your clothes on. Would you agree with that?

DW: Oh, now that I've been away from it for a number of years, and no. I kind of regret some of it. Of course, I'm a lot different; I had a family when I was jumping. But I sure as I look back now, and I sure as heck neglected my family a lot to jump because there's a lot of times like in

'70, hell, I wasn't even home. Didn't take them out on any outings and a lot of those type things. I never really got that cracked up about the jumping part of it. Like I said, the main thing I liked about it is the country that I got to see while I was in that program, but the jumping really never turned me on that much. Although, I never did—once I'd gotten accustomed to it after the first couple years, I got to be, I think, a pretty competent jumper and very seldom ever went into trees. Of course, on the ground, I always did my best to work—worked as hard as I could at getting that thing suppressed. I don't know. A lot of guys, I guess, feel that way, but it never really did all that much for me.

A lot of them, it really wasn't fun jumps. Lot of them, by golly, was kind of nerve racking—windy conditions and up in the North Cascades. Now, I'll tell you we had some rough real estate. There's ain't nothing, a lot of times, nothing but a snag patch or boulder patch. By god, a lot of them jumps were at low altitude—1,200, 1,500 feet. You jump out and open up, and by golly, next thing you knew you was getting pretty close to the ground and smoking in some of them high-elevation jumps. I remember one time a whole batch of us jumped—must have 24, 28, 32 of us—something up, way high on a ridge on Lake Chelan. Middle of a hot afternoon, and the old temperature up there was really up there. I don't know. Must have been—at the elevation we jumped, it was probably 90 degrees, and it was nothing but steep and rocky. Boy, everybody was just bombing in. Why we didn't bust and bones on that one, I'll never know. I never really did get all that much fun out of the actual jump. Some of the more fun, you know. Some we had where we had a big meadow, and you'd talk the pilot into going up a few hundred feet higher, get a little bit of ride out of it. Those were kind of fun but.

CB: Okay. Do you remember, say, what would be the worst conditions for a jump that you made?

DW: Well, I never really did like the wind all that well. I didn't mind rock piles or snag patches or anything else unless the wind was blowing. I know Tony Percival took me down on Lake Chelan one time and was going to kick me out. I looked down there on the lake, and there's about four-foot whitecaps. I just told myself he hadn't better find that fire because I'm not going to get out of this thing if he does. I pretty well meant it because he kind of had a notorious record for crippling guys up anyway. That's one thing I always told myself was, by golly, if I won't jump, I won't ask any of my jumpers to jump. I always stuck by that, and I come up pretty good. I just never really crippled anybody up. All those guys that I dropped in 1970, I dropped 100 of them. If I was to go back and look at the old jump logs or the deals, I put a lot of guys out that year.

CB: Well, how about the jump that you enjoyed the most? Or one of them, I mean.

DW: Well, only one really stands out, and that was up in British Columbia, in which somehow we got fouled up and we got on the other side of the border and it ended up in British Columbia. The old man kind of gave the squad leader a little bit of gas on that and kind of called the name of the fire bad judgment because of where he dropped us. But anyway, that was late evening and it was real high elevation and it was a huge alpine meadow. Must have been a mile long and a half mile wide. We were jumping an Aero Commander and we had a contract pilot

and we talked him into going up. He must have taken us up 5,000 feet over that alpine meadow. We hopped out, and that was funny because then we just sort of assed around like big-ass eagles. That was a lot of fun. We had a lot of time to manipulate, and of course big plush green meadow down below us. That was kind of a fun jump, but most of the other ones, like I said, was just plain work.

CB: Any other stories that—I mean, if you look through that book or something—that you can remember that stand out in your mind for some reason or another? Jumps that—

DW: Like I said, there's that one fire that Entiat Fire called Slide Ridge that made me awful nervous. Another one I'll never forget was up in Alaska—that Z-14 up in Hess (?) Creek. Well, they dropped Keith Fitzgerald and I up there, and it was just...Matter of fact, it wasn't even a fire. I kept telling the squad leader, some yo-yo out of Missoula—he wasn't even proficient spotter come to find out, and he didn't know that the country at all, and he'd just come up there on a bumper crew. They put him in that thing, and then sent him out with a whole load of us. Of course, I'd been a squad leader for a number of years. He kept circling round around this thing and kept telling me there's a fire down. I see a bunch of little fog pockets, you know how they form after a storm. You've been, I'm sure, around those. Anyway, he kept telling me there's fire down there. Hey, buddy, I don't see no goddamn fire down there. My partner—he couldn't see one. 'Well, there's one there. See that broken snag, and see the lightning hit it?'

No, I don't see that either.

'Well, it's down there. Get in the door.'

So, what the hell. We got in the door and out we went. Well, we never did find a fire. Then come to find out, the sucker had mis-plotted us 70 miles. We reported it—we went to report in—we had this little old handy talky, and we never could get contact with anyone we was so far out. Those things only got so much of reach on them. We kept trying to make contact after the second day. Of course, we had our fire pack and the two day's grub. Anyway, never made any contact, so third day—but after the third day we could hear these guys, these jumper patrols, out at night trying to locate us. 'Jump reportable, Wildman,' or whatever they were hollering, and we was trying to get back to them. But our transmission just wouldn't reach them because—

CB: You could hear them over the radio?

DW: Yeah, we could hear them, but we couldn't transmit that far because up there, that's a big country, that interior. Anyway, third day passed, and we as awful [unintelligible]. Of course, by then our groceries were pretty well depleted because we figured they'd be right in to pick us up. Fourth day come along. Still, you could hear them trying to call us. Well, of course, it was daylight all the time up there—24 hours. There we sat up on that ridge, waiting and waiting.

Never heard an airplane. Never heard nothing. Go out scout around once in a while; all you see is big bear tracks and moose track and this and that.

So, fifth day finally showed up. By then, we' was back into the garbage pit. We was rifling through them cans that we'd throw the crackers away before and all this and that. Finally, the fifth day went on by and we're getting nervous then because we figured them yo-yos had us lost. They weren't looking for us in the right spot because every day we could hear them trying to call us. I mean, quite a few days whenever they'd take a jumper run out or go up in that north country there, somebody was trying to get a hold of us. Finally, that sixth morning day—of course, up there that's a big country and they patrol with the multi-engine aircraft because they're so far out. Anyway, an Aero Commander was out patrolling, and we could hear him calling us and calling us. Finally, came into range, and he said, "Where in the hell are you guys at?"

We tell him, "You tell us, buddy." There's an X here on the map supposed to be Hess Creek or something.

He says, "Well, you're not there because that's where I'm at." So, he said, "Can you describe the terrain?" Up there in that interior, that's all basically the same. They said, "What can you...Is there anything?" Well, we could see two great big fires, and it was enough—it was getting late enough in a year where it wasn't completely...I mean, it was daylight all day, but yet you could kind of see a change in the morning. There's so much smoke in there, you'd never seen the sun either. That whole interior basically, they'd had so many big fires, you never did see the sun. So that was another thing. But we kind of suspected that it was coming up where we could judge where east and west was. So, we described to him that these two big fires and where we were from these two huge fires that we could see. He said, "Okay," he says, "Let me make a pass around here. Evidently, they took a great big circle out around then, and then he went out of contact with us. So, he said, "Okay, you're behind me someplace," so he turned around and he came back. Then he says, "I think I know where you're at." He could see these two fires that we were talking about. He finally came within—he said, he was way up there. Anyway, we told him, well, we can hear an airplane. We think that's you.

He said, "Okay, I'm going to let down now." He came down and buzzed us, and then it wasn't two hours they had a helicopter over off one of them big fires and picked us up. At that same time, they'd lost 12 jumpers over in the Yukon territory for 12 days on that same trip. So, that makes me kind of nervous to go when I went up there from there on after.

CB: Was that the spotter's fault too?

DW: Yeah, yeah, yeah. That was again, the spotter. But a lot of them pilots, I think sometimes they don't even know that country. They just go out there—that's a setting and fly until they hit their target and dump guys out.

CB: Well, that's a good one. I never heard of that before.

DW: If you're in it as long as I am, you're going to come up with some of your own. [laughs]

CB: Any other any other memorable jumps that you can think of? That's the most interesting to me. Personally, I like to hear these stories.

DW: Oh, we had a lot of them where they were roarers and a lot of hard work and a lot of busting ass and then a lot...One time we jumped up on Lake Chelan—there was a batch of us—boy, we worked our buns off. The ranger, which is a ranger down on Burns (?) right now, he come by that night in an airplane. Then just before dark from the next morning, he came back by again patrolling the fire, and he sent us a letter. Of course, he addressed it to me because I was squad leader. But I'll always remember that because he said he didn't see how a crew of jumpers could accomplish so much in a short period of time. We had what looked like a telephone—or I mean a power line right away going down over the ridge and down one of them spur ridges from the base of the fire. One whole flank. Then actually we cut off the upper portion down another ridge also before we headed down the hill, and we tied in with an IR crew down there in the bottom. But boy, we really worked that lake. We really had—I had a super good crew. I mean, when you get to know your jumpers and you've worked with them for so many years, you know who your good fallers are and who your good saw men are and who your good line diggers are. If you can get them arranged and get them lined out like that, you can build a lot of line. It's just like you on your IR crews. Some guys were adapted to the chainsaws and could really cut. Other guys were never going to be able to do anything. They was a shovel man back there in the end, and that's the same thing we wanted to do. Learn your people and put them where they work the best.

CB: How do you think that jumping is changed since you started and since you've left it? It's obviously changed some.

DW: Well, I don't know. I think they've got too restrictive, asked too much time off for these guys and a lot of those things. Hell, I can remember—like I said, back in the '70s we all got rummy at times. But there's a lot of times when we went for a straight month maybe not real long hours, but yet because of our physical fitness, by golly, we could endure and go on. I think they've got too restrictive now where they requiring a guy to take his every seventh day off and some of those type things. I really don't think—if it's an emergency or I mean that's a guy's been at it for three weeks solid at 16 hours a day, I think maybe you could take that seventh day off but. I don't think that's really necessary anymore. [pauses] I don't know. I don't know It's the same breed a cat, I guess, today as it was then. Guy's gotta be just as tough. There's still all them snags and rock piles and everything else out there.

I'll tell you another thing, though, that I think a hell of a lot of difference. We never even seen a helicopter until...Well, I mean once in a while you get a little G3-B in, but most of the time you would jump, sack up your gear, and hoof it. I remember in...I can't remember what year—I'd

have to look back on my jump log—but one year there, I got seven jumps in a 10-day period, and there was four jumps—one every afternoon. We were just jumping the base out.

CB: That's what I want [unintelligible].

DW: Get in there—seemed like, well, every day we'd jump. I mean, we'd get back to the base about noon, and we'd get our stuff out of a pickup and then throw it in the loft, and the old man would open the window and say, "Suit up!" We'd look around, and the siren would go off. We'd look around, no jumpers coming in the loft, so we'd scramble and help put one another's chutes on, and out the door you go again. Go out and jump. It seemed like that particular time everyone of them was a potential go-er (?). We'd just bust our ass to suppress that sucker and get a line around it. In those days, they had a lot more ground crews that used to come in and relieve you than they do nowadays. It seemed like a ground crew would come in and relieve us along at 8, 10, 12:00 at night, and we'd go sack up our stuff in the dark, hit the trail, walk maybe five miles, maybe 15 miles out to another road. Climb in a rig pickup, zonk out in the back of a pickup, and drive to the airport. Get up there, throw our shit in the loft, and the siren would go off. Look around, and there you were again. Four days right straight in a row. The seventh jump there in that 10-day period, I got hurt, and that's the only thing that got me off the jump list. That's the only time I ever got hurt jumping. I had broke no bones or anything else, but I was just I was so rummy then that I just there wasn't really, really fully alert when I exited the airplane or even upon landing. I was just kind of a zombie, and I just landed in a rock pile and bruised up my body.

Back then, you didn't see many helicopters. Just damn few. But nowadays—I don't know. Seems to me that a lot of time—especially some of them Missoula jumpers—they'd no more than hit the ground, and they'd put out a triple H—for help, hot food, and a helicopter. Just really not the aggressiveness I'd like see in that group of people because goddamn it they got the potential to really bust their ass and show themselves. This drone (?) round the fire. Get out there, drop your signal streamers, get your people on the ground, bust your ass to get that thing controlled, and then go back and start over all over again. That's what we used to really try and sell ourselves as aggressive firefighting. I think that's what's gonna sell the smokejumper program. Or keep it alive anyway.

CB: Do you think...What do you think its future is?

DW: Well, I don't know. It's getting mitten scary where I'm seeing everything cut back, and I guess, I've seen a lot of change in fire management. The pendulum swing this way one for a while and then go the other way so hopefully. I think there'll always be a need for jumpers. Because I think it's relatively a cheap suppression process compared to the helicopters and it's pretty self-sufficient guys. They get out there. Hell, just leave them there until they come out of the woods unless they're really needed. I certainly hope that the smokejumper program goes on and on forever and ever and ever as long as we got national forests to protect. But I think there's gonna be some big changes maybe in the let-burn policies and some of the other things

that maybe isn't going to require as many jumpers. But I think it'd be just bad to do away with them. They're too valuable a tool.

CB: Maybe I should change this tape here.

[Break in audio; long pause]

CB: Let's see. Oh, I wanted to assure you that none of this is going to be played for anybody, but Carl. Okay. I wanted to tell you that before but.

DW: No, I can care less.

CB: But, it's like...Okay. What do you think of the centralization of smokejumping. Like all of Region 6 at Redmond?

DW: Well, I think that's a loser too. I think to get that quick response, that fast and initial attack, you're going to have to get your people closer to the fire areas. That's why we developed La Grande. That's why it was developed, and that's why Redmond was developed when you really want to look at it. Why did the Redmond guys go down to Lakeview (?) every year and down on the you every year get down on the [unintelligible] or Klamath Falls and jump out there during hunting season? You've got to get where the action is. If you're going to be one central place and you're going to be two hours on a fire run, hell, you might just will use some other some other resources.

But with technology—let me just make some predictions. I think somewhere along the turn of the century, I'm not too sure we're going to have a whole lot of initial attack forces. I think if we really development—and it's gonna be a costly thing—but I think they could set up like Nike (?) rockets with modules in them full of retardant or whatever and heat-seeking device type things. I mean, the thing is you want to make goddamn sure it's a wildfire before you push the button. But there's all kinds of those things. Hell, I used to laugh at Buck Rogers when I was a kid, but look at their walking on the goddamn moon and all kinds of things nowadays. With technology going on down the road, there could be a lot of really superior things in fire management on down the road, but they're going to be expensive and there's going to be—hell, look what they're doing with the detection, lightning detection system, nowadays with electronics.

CB: Is that effective—that system?

DW: Oh yeah, yeah. I was down at Burns here a couple of weeks ago, and I was looking a lot of their scans. Hell, they showed all the way up into Okanagan country. Man, the jumpers were jumping to beat hell up there the next morning. The only thing is it tells where you got it, and then you've got to go out there and patrol those areas and see if there been any starts. It doesn't tell you whether you've got an actual fire going there. All it tells you is you had a ground strike there. One of these days I'm sure through satellite and all kinds of things, it may be this

thing may flash and tell you had a strike there, then maybe two minutes later, it may tell you whether you've got a heat source there or not too. I think there's a lot of things that could be developed whether they want to put the dollars and the effort and things like that. It's possible, I guess. I don't know.

CB: What do you think about women jumping? I know I asked you before I should have asked—

DW: [pauses] Well, I just don't foresee a woman. There might be one in 5,000 or one in 1,000 that could muscle through that and do an effective job. But I guess I'm kind of from the old-school tradition, and I'm old-fashioned and an old-timer and I just not feel that that's any of their goddamn business [laughs] in that particular field. I think those areas of fire management that they do good in such as in some of the detection systems like in the lookouts and the some of the dispatching fields and there's other areas. But I don't think they belong in the smokejumping organization. That's about it. I just don't think...They just too damn...They just haven't got the muscle or the coordination or the stamina. I've seen some goddamn big scrapping boys down behind that line and out there for a long time—12, 14, 16 hours—and then sleeping in a rock pile and up the next day mopping up for 12 or 14 hours and the same thing and then throw a pack on their back and walk 15 miles out over rough terrain. I don't think the gals has got it at them unless they start breeding some Amazon someplace along the line.

CB: What would you see as the changes in jumping off if there were women brought in, say, in the traditions? Or would change just the atmosphere around the loft? Do you think?

DW: Well, I'll tell you, you've got a whole batch of us old jumpers, we'd all say, you just went tits up. I think that's just the beginning of the ruination of a hell of a good program because I just there's just too much *esprit des corps* in that outfit. I'm not against women in most areas, but that's one of them I just don't see it. I just—[pauses]

CB: I asked you about the centralization, and now all the rigging and all the sewing is being done at Redmond and the other bases don't have that anymore. They don't even have their sewing machines. They don't have the right to rig in their lofts. I wonder what kind of effect do you see that having on those other bases?

DW: Well, as far as being effective, it's some stupid decisions been passed down somewhere because why in the hell can those guys have a little dressmaker sitting up there at inner city and they get a fire bust or a little fire bust where they keep everybody going. They've got chutes to repair, why fly an airplane all the way from up there to retrieve some bad parachutes and bring them some fresh ones. In a few hours, they could have those back in service, and they could rig up their own and keep right on going. It's just a monetary thing, and there's just another burden on the taxpayers—some of these type things.

CB: Did you guys have any songs? Rookie songs or songs you used to sing a lot.



DW: Oh, there was a few, but I don't even remember what the title was. Oh, there was Rocky—he's a lawyer down California now. He had a good one. Something about one of the old gals in the neighborhood up there. [laughs] It was pretty filthy.

CB: Well, if somebody could get a hold him, would he be willing to give out the words, do you think?

DW: [laughs] Hell what was the name of that? Hell was the name of that? Song...Oh, I don't know if he would or not. I don't know if he's got them anymore. His name's Rockwell. What the heck was his first name? I've got it there in the book someplace. He's a lawyer down in California now. We always just call him Rocky, and he was really a good egg. Man, he could sure sing that.

CB: Can you also see recommend other people you jump with who would you think would be good to talk with? Or other people you knew of?

DW: Let's see. Old Terry McCabe would been a good one. Terry'd been a good one. Old Ray Casey (?). You probably heard of him, and he was there at Redmond for a long time. [pauses] Al, and there's Boucher (?)—Al Boucher. He's right there in Redmond, and he goes back a lot further than I do—Al does.

CB: Oh, he's with the region now I think though.

DW: No, he isn't. No, he's retired, and he was living—he's retired, and he lives right there in Redmond now. Al Boucher.

CB: Oh, he was with the region.

DW: Yeah, well, was he with—no, he was assistant staff down on the Mount Hood or the—

CB: Okay, that's what it was.

DW: Yeah, yeah. He was assistant staff on the Hood or a dispatcher or some damn thing down there. I'm sure I'm going to see him up there at Zander's party.

CB: Should be a good one.

DW: But Al will tell you about back in the era when Skinny was jumping. McCabe—but Buck Pinot (?), you know. I don't know if you ever heard of Buck, and Buck used to be one hell of a jumper. Except he had a terrible fear of jumping for some reason or other. He had a tendency to—bad knees and bad ankles. Goddamn, it seemed like he got a lot of injuries, but once he was—you got him outside that airplane, he was a tremendously good chute manipulator. But

he's at Boise now as the head dispatcher, and he was one hell of a good jumper for many a year. Buck and Terry McCabe—he's the FMO at Twisp right there. If you ever get back up that way, you might see if you can get a hold of him. Of course, a lot of guys left it. Ray Casey, he's FMO on Tenaska now.

CB: Do you know the guy's name who was—he was the boss or the assistant boss at Cave when they started it up in '49? I think his first name was Bob. Because I ran into his brother in Cave one night, and his brother just sat me down and started telling me these stories. I couldn't believe it. I said you should've heard what Bob told me. He was going on and on and on. I can't remember what his name was [unintelligible].

DW: I can't either. The only ones—Jim and Al Boucher both came from there. And John Cowan—that's where he started his pilot career. Ken Kavin (?) started his pilot career up there for us. And Dave Russell. Old Dave, he goes back—I don't know how far he goes back. Let's see, when did he show up? He must have showed up in the late '60s, and he ought to have some good stories.

CB: Yeah, I'll have to get in touch with him. All right, well, really appreciate all your time. It's been real interesting for me to just sit here and listen.

[End of Interview]