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Oral History 404-01
Smokejumper Oral History Collection
Interviewee: James Arthur (Smokey) Alexander
Interviewer: Denise Alexander Bittner
December 8, 2002

DB: How did the U.S. smoke jumping program start?

JA: It started because, in the backcountry with very few roads and only trails and mule packs to get into a fire, we wanted to get the fires controlled before they got to the place where they'd have to walk in hundreds of men. And the Forest Service figured if they could train experienced fire fighters to be parachute jumpers, so they could jump into the woods ahead of a small fire and put it out before it got to be a large fire, or at least to damp it down, so that the fuel would be eliminated from the head of it, so that when a crew came in, it wouldn't be quite so large. And that was the theory or philosophy behind the starting of the smokejumpers.

DB: Why did they choose Montana, and why Missoula for the first squad?

JA: Because Missoula was the regional headquarters for region number one of the U.S. Forest Service, and it was headquarters for all of the ten western national forests which were considered the most dangerous fire forests, and where this sort of protection would be most beneficial.

DB: What got you interested in smoke jumping?

JA: I was working on the Cabinet National Forest in the St. Regis Ranger District, and I'd already had three years experience there and four actual, additional years in fighting fire from high school on, and the first two years of college at the University of Montana. And they asked for volunteers on the ten critical fire forests in western Montana, northern Idaho, and I volunteered in my forest, the old Cabinet National Forest. And I was accepted.

DB: You say the old Cabinet National Forest. Has that name been changed?

JA: The Cabinet National Forest, headquartered at Thompson Falls, Montana, consisted of about eight or ten ranger districts. And later on...I'm talking now about 1940. I'm actually going back further and talking about 1936. Sometime after World War II, with the advent of helicopters and more roads in the backcountry and better trail systems and so forth, they could get people into fires more quickly. They decided, on economics, to break up several forests. So they broke the Cabinet up, and part of it went to the Kaniksu Forest up out of Libby, and part of it went to the Flathead Forest at Kalispell, and the last part of it, the biggest majority of it, went to the Lolo National Forest out of Missoula.

DB: What years were you a smokejumper, and where were you assigned?

JA: Only two years.... 1940 and 1941, just before the War. And I was assigned....we took our original training at Blanchard Flats, on the Seeley Lake Ranger District north of Missoula, Montana. And after the training was completed, why we all flew to Moose Creek Ranger Station down in Central Idaho, where George Case was the Ranger, and we spent the summer there. That was the first headquarters. And the second year I jumped, we did our training out at the old Nine Mile Remount, and I was assigned to go to Big Prairie Ranger Station on the South Fork of the Flathead. Dick Lynch, who was one of the original smokejumpers with me in 1940, was the squad leader, and I assisted him as assistant squad leader on the squad that went to the South Fork of the Flathead.

DB: You've mentioned this briefly, but what were you doing before you were a smokejumper, and when did you do that?

JA: Well I graduated from Great Falls High School in 1936 and immediately went out as a senior Eagle Scout to a Boy Scout Camp south of Great Falls in the Little Belt Mountains. And when we got through with that after several weeks, why we came back into Great Falls. And the Forest Service was putting out a call for fire fighters to go up to Zandusky, Montana where they had some fires....I can't think of the name of the mountains, now. So a bunch of us went up there and fought fire for several weeks. And then I fought fire from there down on Straight Creek, and

west of Augusta, Montana. And then a whole crew of us, why we got on some box cars and rode the freight trains out of Missoula, and we fought several fires on the North Fork of the Flathead. These were quite large fires. And then we got on freight trains again and went to Spokane and fought some fires north of Spokane. And these other guys wanted to go on into Seattle and get on the freight trains, and I said "No, I'm going back to Missoula." So I came back to Missoula and went back to Great Falls. And then that fall, I fought another large fire southeast of Lewistown, Montana. The snow drove us out of that one.

DB: Did you always want to work in the woods?

JA: Yes, I liked to work in the woods. I acquired a love of the woods when I was a Boy Scout, and it was a nice, clean way to live. There weren't very many opportunities at that time to really advance in the woods. I remember Dean Spaulding of the Forestry School at the University of Montana said, "Take a look at the guy on the right of you and the guy on the left of you, and after the first quarter, only one of you will be there." It was so tough that they were flunking guys out right and left.

DB: Why do you think you were chosen to be on that first squad?

JA: The forest supervisor of the Cabinet was a man by the name of Abbott. I can't recall his first name. There were about ten of us who volunteered on the Cabinet National Forest, and Mr. Abbott had to choose one of us to represent the Cabinet Forest on this first smoke jumping project. Evidently he thought that I qualified for it or was crazy enough to do it. Anyway, I wound up to be the representative for the Cabinet National Forest.

DB: Who was on that first squad besides you?

JA: We had a project leader named Merle Lundrigen. He was off the Lolo Forest. Then we had a man named Francis Lufkin from Region Six, up out of Wenatchee, Washington. Rufus Robinson represented the Bitterroot National Forest, and he was one of the two men who jumped on the first fire. Dick Lynch represented the Flathead National Forest. And there was Chet

Derrif, who was an instructor/rigger, and Glen Smith from Region Six as a jumper/rigger. And the jumpers on that first year included Earl Cooley off the Bitterroot, who was on the first jump along with Rufus Robinson; Jim Waite off the Clearwater; George Honey from Region Six; and Jim Alexander off the Cabinet Forest. All of the above (he's reading from a document) were experienced men from last year's jumping project. The additional fifty new trainees were all experienced smokejumpers and represent eight national forests in this region. This was a memo by Ralph L. Hand, at that time was Assistant Regional Forester for Region One in Missoula.

DB: What was the training like? You were going into this kind of blind. What was the training like?

JA: There was a lot of calisthenics for one thing. And then we practiced let-down techniques because the risers on the parachute had to be detachable in case we got stuck up in tall trees and we couldn't get to the ground. So the risers had to be detachable with a heavy clasp that would let us unhinge it and let ourselves down with a hundred feet of rope if we had to go that far. We practiced with the gear, the helmet and the meshmask, the boots, and the jump jacket and the pants. We didn't have a tower at that time, so we kind of had a makeshift thing off the back of a pickup where we'd jump and roll. Frank Derry led us in a complete procedure on how to pull the ripcord and all the various parts of the parachute. We had to learn the names of everything on the parachute. And we had two different chutes. We had a main backpack, and then of course we had an emergency chute that sat on our chest. And we had to learn how to, in case the backpack failed, make use of the emergency chute. And that was about all the training we had. Except I can still remember all those calisthenics.

DB: Was there a physical exam? And what was it like?

JA: We had a very thorough physical exam at old Fort Missoula. In 1940, Fort Missoula was still in operation, run by the army, and the Fourth Infantry Regiment was still stationed there, and they'd been there for many years. Of course when the War started, why they took all those men out of there. Fort Missoula is still standing now. I don't know what they're using it for. But we

had very thorough physical exams by army doctors. Of the ten men in the original group, one of the men failed to pass the physical. And so he went back...I think his name was Hamilton...he went back to his forest.

DB: How long was the training and where did you train?

JA: All of the original training, before we started jumping, was on the Seeley Lake Ranger District, adjacent to Blanchard Flats, which was north of Seeley Lake. It was a huge open area surrounded by a lot of snags from an old forest fire. And that's where we made our original jumps. And that's where all the training took place. We had several tents put up, and we slept in the tents, and that's where we had all of our stuff stored.

DB: You mentioned briefly a little bit about the training equipment out of the back of the pickup truck, but what other kind of training equipment did you use? Did you construct any towers or anything?

JA: We never had a tower the first year. We used the back of the pickup, and we used mounds of dirt, and that sort of thing. We didn't have any mock-up or anything of a tower or anything. That was all the training that really we had. And the day before we made the first jumps, they gave us our first ride in an airplane. I'd never been in an airplane before. They took us up in the Ford Trimotor, and we circled the field a few times, ran out over some of the timber and came back and landed. And that was all the training that we had in the air. But while we were in the air, I think Frank Derry instructed us in some things that we could hear over the roar of the motors.

DB: What type of parachutes did you have and what were they like?

JA: In those days, we were jumping a 30-foot Eagle parachute manufactured by the Eagle Parachute Company in Lancaster, Pennsylvania. It was a big chute. It was a 30-foot chute, and it had little flaps on it, skirts on it, and a shroud line was attached to two of them. If you wanted to go left, you pulled down the left shroud line, and the chute would turn left. If you wanted to go right, you'd turn down the right shroud line, and it would go to the right, and that's how you

maneuvered it. And then we had a 26-foot Eagle emergency chute that sat on our chest, and we would use that.... there were very few times anyone had to use that....but in case something happened to the backpack.

DB: What were your smoke jumping outfits like, the first ones?

JA: Basically the same as they're jumping now, sixty years later. Helmets are the same, and I think they have a little different material for the jacket and for the pants. The material was very stiff and cumbersome, but now that they've got better material, softer material, maybe stronger material, the jumping suits and pants are of a better quality and easier to use.

DB: How about boots? Did they issue any boots, and what were the helmets like?

JA: No, we bought our own boots. We all had boots. We couldn't have boots with metal clogs in them. We had to have boots with rubber soles. And we generally bought the White Boot of the White Boot Manufacturing Company of Spokane. We did have an ankle brace that we used that went over the top of the boot, and that was easy to put on and easy to take off. But our boots were all the same. And the helmets were basically a football helmet with a steel mesh mask on the face. Two hinges would lower it up and down, and we would attach it on the side with straps and hinges. And invariably when we got all hooked up, well then your nose would begin to itch. So you'd have to have a straw or a little piece of twig or something that everyone was using to scratch their nose.

DB: What kind of equipment did you carry with you?

JA: Well basically we didn't carry any equipment with us because as soon as we got on the ground, they dropped all the equipment to us. Maybe if you had several men, one guy would have a radio in a pocket on his right leg so that he could talk to the plane overhead. It was the kind of a radio that you had to be almost directly overhead for direct transmission. We did carry 100 feet of rope in a pocket on one of our legs. I can't recall which side it was on now. We carried a big clasp knife in a little pocket on our right sleeve in case we got tangled in the

parachute coming down, or upon opening and we had to cut it away to get to the emergency chute. It was a very good knife, and we kept it very sharp at all times.

DB: You talked about the plane a little bit and going up the day before. What was the plane like?

JA: Just a basic Ford Trimotor plane, three motors and a rounded door. It's a plane that had been used by American and United in passenger service. It carried about seven or ten passengers and a pilot and a co-pilot. They'd taken all of the seats and everything out of the plane so that the jumpers could get in there with their parachutes and their gear that they were going to drop on a fire. It was very noisy, and it was very uncomfortable.

DB: What was your first jump like?

JA: We drew straws the night before in which order we would jump. And out of five guys, I drew number four. So three guys jumped before me. I was number four and Earl Colley was number five. It wasn't that much of a deal. The door was off the plane. It was a little Travelaire plane. It was a big door, and the door was off the plane, and they had a step built that we could steady our foot on so we wouldn't be swept away in the sweep stream. And you just got out on the step, you looked down, you had your hand on the ripcord, and you just let go and away you went. I think we counted up to ten, and you did that so you didn't pull it so quick that the parachute would open and get caught on the tail. So you wanted to be free of the plane. Then you pulled the ripcord, and it opened. There was a big jerk. It wasn't hard to do. In fact it was a very peaceful ride. You looked above you and here was the canopy. We had a spot down on the field at Blanchard Flats, and as I recall, I came within about less than ten feet away from this cross. It was considered to be a good jump. It was very exhilarating and very peaceful, but when you started to come close to the ground, the ground came up pretty fast. We landed on our feet and fell forward, the way they taught us to do so it would break some of the fall so you wouldn't break a leg. Other than that it was pretty routine.

DB: Were you afraid at all?

JA: No. There was nothing to be afraid of that I could see.

DB: What made you decide to jump out of that plane again?

JA: Well I had a good experience on the first one, and because everybody else had jumped, and we were a crew and we were all good friends, and we were all going through the same training. We wanted to do a good job and help in fighting these fires, and it was just one of those things. It was your job. You got paid to do it. We liked to do it.

DB: What was your first actual smoke jumping jump? What fire and what year?

JA: It was 1940. I can tell you exactly when it was. (He examines his parachute log) It was July 20, 1940. The name of the fire was the Cox Creek Fire. Dick Lynch and I jumped at 2000 feet. We jumped in a meadow about, oh maybe 1/2 or 3/4 of a mile away from the fire. Now that first jump was an experiment. It was at the head of Moose Creek at Moose Creek Ranger Station in central Idaho. They had these lightning strikes the night before, and they'd had a couple of puffs of smoke up there, but they hadn't seen any fire break out, but they'd seen the lightning strikes. So they got the altimeter readings between two lookouts to spot it, and even though there was no smoke, they decided to drop Dick Lynch and I in there and we would take our compasses and run down those azimuth readings from those two lookouts and see if we could find the fire. And it worked perfectly. We were on a real good line with it, and we found the fire, and we could smell it. We could smell the smoke. It was just a very, very little fire. It was getting about seven o'clock at night, and so Dick and I kept the fire going that night. We slept there by the side of the fire. In the morning, we put the fire out. It wasn't a very big fire at all, but we put it all out. It was cold when we left. Then we dropped down into the head of Moose Creek to a cabin that was there, and they said there was some food in this cabin. It was a Forest Service cabin. And we found a can of Sego Milk and some coffee, and that's all the food that was there. So we made a pot of coffee and we drank the coffee. We took the can of milk with us. We had our pulaskis and our jump jackets, because they were nice and warm. And we headed for Moose Creek Ranger Station, which was approximately 50 miles away. It was all downhill on a real good trail, and we got into Moose Creek way after dark that night. We picked some berries on the way. Then we

figured about noon, why we broke open this can of milk and he drank half of it and I drank the other half, and that's all the grub we had for that day. And there were so many elk down in there that we were slapping them on the butts, getting them out of the way of the trail, just hundreds and hundreds of elk down in there. It was a beautiful trip, though. But our feet were so sore, we could hardly get our boots off when we got into Moose Creek Ranger Station.

DB: What was that first fire season like, the first smoke jumping season for you, and how many fires did you jump into, and where were they?

JA: It was a very good fire season. Had very few fires, and that was a good deal. They had several very large fires. The next fire I jumped on was with Jim Waite. He's now dead. We jumped on Lizard Creek Fire July 29, 1940. We jumped on that fire from 2000 feet elevation. That was a bigger fire. I've got a whole story on that fire by Jim Waite (already donated to the archives). Here's the actual fire jump. He said he heard me holler. He said, "I then heard Jim yell, so I knew that he had made it alright although I had not seen him leave the ship nor the descent." That was kind of a bad fire. It was bigger than what we should have been on, but we were knocking them (trees, brush) down ahead of it. Like he said in his article, "26 men arrived the next evening. The following morning, Jim and I were released. We arrived at Moose Creek Ranger Station at 3:00 p.m. the following day, July 27. (Some discrepancies about dates between Waite and Alexander. Alexander is going by his parachute log) One thing I remember about that fire was jumping into a nice meadow. We always tried to get a meadow away from the fire so we wouldn't get hung up. The grass was almost up to our waist. It was a beautiful meadow with lots of grass for the elk. When I got off the jumping pants, a little field mouse ran up my leg (he chuckles). So I had to take my pants off to get rid of him.

DB: Do you remember how many fires you jumped into and where they were that first year?

JA: Well the first year, let's see (he's checking his parachute log), the Cox Creek Fire was number one, the Lizard Creek Fire was number two. Well those were the only two fires I jumped on. When the main fire season was on they couldn't use us because all the ships (planes) and all the other crews were in action someplace and they couldn't use us. We did other things around the ranger station. In 1941, however, July 18, we all left the Flathead National Forest, the ranger

station we were at, and we all flew to Chelan National Forest, and we landed at Methow, Washington. We were all day flying over there. About 6:00 p.m. that night they decided to jump Wagner Dodge and myself on a fire on what they called the Weasel Creek Fire, way at the head of Lake Chelan. We circled up there. There was a fire that was way up on top. They were in danger. They didn't want it to roll down into the heavy timber below. So they decided to jump us that night. Francis Lufkin spotted for us, and I jumped first, and we jumped at about 600 feet altitude. We had the static line then, and we wanted to be sure that we got on the ground instead of floating off down into the canyons. Then in the next pass Wagner jumped. We fought that fire all night. It was kind of a nasty little fire, and we got it put out. Then we had to climb down through all that timber, all those rocks and crevices and so forth. It was steep going down into the canyon. Then we walked on a trail to the head of Lake Chelan. We stayed there one night, and then the boat came up and took us down to Chelan, Washington. They provided a ride for us to go back up to Winthrop and Methow. Then on August 8, there were about thirty of us jumped on the Dean Creek Fire on the Flathead National Forest in the Bob Marshall Wilderness. That was a mean nasty fire, and we hurt one guy pretty badly. He jumped in some slag rock and broke a leg. We got the fire pretty well squared away, and then we carried him out, on a makeshift stretcher. It took a lot of us to carry him out. We couldn't walk on a trail. The trail was about a foot deep, so we had to walk on the side of the trail.

DB: Did the armed forces learn from your training?

JA: The first year, 1940, the War Department, they called it the War Department then, sent out several Army men and Air Force men to observe our training at Seeley Lake. There were several of them. The one Army man in charge was a Major, W. C. Lee of the Infantry Branch of the Army. He was sent out to try and find out everything he could about parachute jumping because the Army was thinking about starting the 101st and the 82nd Airborne Divisions, and he wanted to watch the training of any organized parachute groups in the United States. There was Major William C. Lee, and the pilot of that plane was a Captain C.A. Ross of the Army Air Force. There were several other people. There were some warrant officers. They didn't stay long. They were going out to Fort Lewis in the State of Washington. But they took a couple of thousand pictures of all of the things that we were doing, and interviewed us, how we felt, and how we felt

after we got on the ground, and could we maneuver, and so forth. So we told them everything we knew about this situation. They wanted to know if we wanted to come back with them at the end of the fire season, if several of us wanted to come back to Fort Benning, Georgia and become a part of the cadre to start the 82nd and the 101st Airborne Divisions, but all of us declined. We wanted to get on with our lives and go back to the University of Montana and whatever else we were doing. I have a lot of names of all the rest of the Army and Air Force people who were there if you'd like to have them.

DB: Did you ever have a close call, either on a jump or fighting fires where you thought you were in danger?

JA: At some time during the first year, we were watching the two riggers that we had, Chet Derry and Glen Smith taught us how to pack each other's chutes. So we got quite proficient at it, and we were jumping the chutes that these guys packed. We had a practice up at Moose Creek, and my backpack didn't open completely. One of the shroud lines didn't disengage from the canopy, and it never did fully inflate. So I pulled my emergency and came to the ground. And the instructor, Frank Derry, never said a word. He just put another parachute on me and put me in the plane. He and I went back up, and I made another jump within ten minutes. Now the psychology behind that is probably if I had sat there and thought about that for awhile, I probably never would have made any more jumps. But the fact that before I got a chance to really think about it, why I made another jump, and that took care of that. I mean I never had any more fear. Never did have any fear anyway. So that eliminated any difficulties on that situation. As far as fighting fire, yes, I've had a number of close calls, but because we were experienced fire fighters, we were able to get out of the situation. One of the best friends I had, Wagner Dodge, who was under me in a jump in the Chelan National Forest north of Lake Chelan in Washington, went through that terrible experience at Mann Creek in the summer of 1949, when he lost thirteen, I think it was thirteen men on the Mann Creek Fire. He died of a broken heart. If those guys would have stayed with Wagner and followed his instructions, most of them would still be alive today. But they chose to run, and they panicked, and they went up the hill. And the fire ran over the top of them. But it really wasn't the fire that killed them. They ran out of oxygen. They suffocated. There have been several books written about the Mann Creek Fire, and they had an investigation

on it and changed a lot of the tactics for the smokejumpers after that. But that was the only experience that I had along those lines.

DB: What did you love most about being a smokejumper?

JA: I liked everything about it. I think the best thing I liked about it was the guys that you were working with, the squads, because you were all close friends. There were elements of danger in it. We all took the same risks, and we all tried to help each other. Then when we got on the ground and started fighting fire, we still had to coordinate as a team to do the right procedures in fighting the fire. We looked out after each other. It was a nice experience. As I said previously, I liked everything about it.

DB: Does it take a certain kind of person to be a Smokejumper, and what type of person do you think it takes?

JA: I don't think it takes any special sort of a person. I think that most anybody with good common sense could become a smokejumper. There probably are some people who have a great fear of heights and a lot of people who won't fly in an airplane. If you recall in the smokejumper program, now, that there have been several thousand people who have gone through the program since it started in 1940. Look at the thousands and thousands of men who have been trained as airborne troops in the 82nd and the 101st and the 11th and all other types of organized parachute outfits. I guess now they're giving psychiatric tests and that sort of thing to see if they won't panic or anything, but we never had anything like that. In the first year of the smokejumpers, we didn't have the static line. It was freefall. We had to get out and jump and pull our own ripcord. And Bill Bolin, who represented the Kootenai Forest out of Libby, Montana, on the first jump, Bill fell about 4,000 feet before he finally decided to pull the ripcord. We were watching on the ground and just hoping that he would pull the ripcord. He finally did. When he got on the ground, he said "I don't want to do this anymore," and Frank Derry said, "I'm going to wash you out anyway." With the advent of the static line, your chute was fully deployed almost immediately after you got out of the plane. Gravity took care of opening the chute, and there were very, very few accidents in that respect.

DB: What was the pay for being a smokejumper?

JA: We got the magnificent sum of \$2,000 a year plus board and room. Many times board was just K-rations, and room was a sleeping bag under a tree, or maybe we didn't even have that. We'd have to use our jumper jackets on us, because it would get pretty cold in the high country at night.

DB: Did Mother (Dorothy Taylor Alexander) ever see you jump?

JA: Yes. Mother saw me make a practice jump out at the Nine-Mile Remount in 1941. We were engaged at the time, and I had a \$1,000 life insurance policy, and she made me make her the beneficiary of it after she saw me make the jump, so she was thinking ahead then. (He chuckles)

DB: Why did you stop being a smokejumper, and do you wish you could have jumped longer?

JA: The War was coming on, World War II, and things were very up in the air. I did go back to school. And then Dorothy and I were engaged to be married at Christmas time of 1941. I didn't know what was going to happen during the War years about smoke jumping. After the War I didn't go back. But during the War, they had conscientious objectors who were doing the smoke jumping. The various churches that these conscientious objectors belonged to supplied them with their clothing, their boots, and no pay. The Forest Service didn't pay them any money but supplied them with board and room and hospitalization. But during the War years, fire seasons were very light. They didn't have a bad fire year during the War. After the War, I was already working for a major corporation, was trying to get everything together, so I never did go back to the Forest Service. Surprisingly, not very many guys did go back to the Forest Service after the War. I know Fred Brower did and Jim Waite and Earl Copley. Earl Cooley never went to the War. That's about the size of it.

DA: Was there a movie that you jumped for, or some special publicity of something like that?

JA: They shot two movies about the smokejumpers. One in 1941 and one in 1942. The 1941 was called "The Forest Ranger," and it starred Fred McMurray and Pauletta Goddard and Susan Hayward. Regis Toomi (?sp) was the pilot of the plane. He was the bad guy. There was another famous actor, and I can't think of his name. Several of us were asked to be in it as extras, and because they were going to show smokejumpers, that was the reason they had us. They paid us extra money which was a magnificent sum in those days. Fred McMurray was the tallest man on the picture, and I was the tallest man on the squad, so I doubled for Fred McMurray. It only showed a couple of shots of Fred McMurray getting out of the airplane. But it was a lot of fun, and we shot that in western Montana. In 1942, they shot a picture called "The Red Skies of Montana", and that was a major picture starring Richard Widmark and Robert Lundrigen and Tab Hunter. It was a major picture. There was a lot of publicity. I had nothing to do with that in 1942. Both of these pictures are still around, and once in a very, very great while they'll show up on some late TV channel.

DB: Is there anything else you want to tell me and us about smoke jumping

JA: Well not right now. There will probably be other things that come to mind. The big fire that they had where all those men lost their lives, on Mann Creek, in 1949, for some reason, the Forest Service had lowered the standards for smokejumpers. A lot of those kids were seventeen and eighteen years old. Most of them were that age on the Mann Creek Fire, and they were too immature to be up there. Most of them had maybe been on a lookout for a couple of months, but never had any major firefighting experience and didn't know how to act, and they panicked. Two of the other men, and they were young men....one of them died recently, one is still alive....who were up there with Wagner Dodge at Mann Creek, they made it out to the top of the hill. They got up into a crevice in some rocks. It was pretty hot up there but at least they survived. After that, they started, almost immediately, to revamp the entire jumping school and procedures and so forth. Trainees who were coming in had to be older and they had to have three or four years of experience like we had. Actually we had to have a minimum of three years of experience actually fighting fires, not being on lookouts. Most of us had more than that. And that's what I suppose kept a lot of us alive while fighting these fires. After the War, it really took off. They established smoke jumping cadres at Cave Junction in Oregon, several depots in California, and

down in New Mexico. They had a small one in Yellowstone Park for a while. Of course they had the one in McCall, Idaho. They had one at Idaho City for a while. The one we had at Big Prairie Ranger Station, they did away with that one, disbanded that one. They disbanded the one they had at Nine Mile Remount for a while, and then they brought it back when they built the big Smokejumper headquarters and loft at the Missoula Airport. That was all transferred down to the big Missoula Airport. Over the years, smoke jumping has saved many hundreds of thousands of acres of timber and probably a lot of lives, too. In the old days, they used to have untrained help. They'd clear all the bars and saloons out in Missoula and Butte and Helena and Spokane and Grangeville and Kooski, to take them in on fires. These guys might last a day or two and their feet would begin to hurt, and they couldn't handle it anyway because they were in no physical shape. They don't do that anymore. They have trained squads. Surprisingly now they have some girls who are in these squads. The girls can't pack as much weight as men. It's just one of those things. They just cannot handle that big of a heavy load. There was a fire in western Colorado called the Storm King Fire several years ago, and they lost a whole crew up there, almost identical to the fire at Mann Creek in 1949. They made some basic mistakes, but they were an experienced crew. So even experienced people can get hurt. They have crews that really work the year round. Down in New Mexico and in Arizona, they have Indians who fight fire all year long, and go into northern Mexico, too. And that's a way of life. They're fighting fires all year long. They get paid a pretty good wage. They're trained well. They take good care of each other. That's all they do is fight fire, and they're very good at it. I'll think of something later on.

DB: I just want to tell you I love you, and I'm very proud to be your daughter.