

Maureen and Mike

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**Oral History Number: 133-078**

**Interviewee: Charles "Ted" Nyquist**

**Interviewer: Renee Gouaux**

**Date of Interview: May 19, 1984**

**Project: Smokejumpers 1984 Reunion Oral History Project**

Renee Gouaux: This is an interview with Ted Nyquist at his home in Milltown, Montana on May 19, 1984. The interviewer is Renee Gouaux. Okay, I guess the first question I would like to ask you is: what attracted you to smoke jumping?

Charles Nyquist: I was working for the Forest Service when I was a Junior in high school in Boulder, Montana and the ranger at Boulder introduced me to smoke jumping. I didn't know anything about it. And I had learned that we had a couple of smoke jumpers on a particular district that I worked on. And so, this got my interest up. And after I graduated from high school, I had 2 years of Forest Service work, and he made a special trip over to Missoula to talk to the project leader, which was quite a thing for him to do on his part. And as a consequence, Fred Brauer, who was the project leader, hired me on the next summer. And so I just...My first year going over in Missoula going to Forestry School, why, I went right into the jumpers that next summer.

RG: So, how old were you when you started jumping?

CN: I was 19 when I started jumping. That was, like I say, 1954. And the...Fred Brauer met us. We came over—came in on the bus. He met us in a Forest Service vehicle, and took us down to the Westerners, where all the smokejumpers bought their boots in Buffalo—or the boots that they were required to have. And then we went directly out to the base.

RG: Were those boots that you jumped in? Or boots that you just wore around town.

CN: Boots that we wore around camp and jumped in and used on project and the whole works.

RG: What kind of boots were they?

CN: They were...Forest Service recommended them because they were a fairly high top. And they had a high heel which was good for coming down steep, slippery slopes, like on bear grass and so forth. And a real thick sole, which stood up under, you know, hot coals and fire and so forth. And they were quite heavy, and they were hot, and that was a major disadvantage—they were very hot. But they did hold up well and they were good protection, so they were good.

RG: Would you usually get a new pair for every season, or did they last longer than that?

CN: They...the boots lasted 2 to 3 seasons. And you could send them into the factory and get them completely rebuilt. And they'd send them back, and they'd last for maybe another

season. And then the tops would go out, and you would have to get a new pair.

RG: How many years did you jump?

CN: I jumped in '54, '55. Let's see, '54; I was out '55 and '56. I came back in '57 and '58 and I went into the Marine Corps in '59. Came back the Summer of '60, '61, '62, '63, '64, '65, '67, '68. And then I came back again in 1972.

RG: So that's 13 seasons?

CN: Thirteen seasons, right.

RG: That's a lot of time. What kind of training did you have before you made your first jump?

CN: I had the standard training that they gave. Which included: seven training jumps; and extensive fire training; map reading; power equipment training, like chain saws and pumpers. And it was a very well-rounded course. I enjoyed it very much, and I especially liked the map reading and it still sticks with me today. I just...I spend a lot of time out in the hills and map reading was one of my favorite courses. I just loved it.

RG: That's interesting. How long a period of time was this training period? Do you remember?

CN: It lasted, let's see, I think it lasted for close to a month for the full training. And the training was always longer for the beginning smokejumper. When you first went in, it lasted a month and then for those that came back, they had what they called a refresher course. And the refresher course was just a week long and included two jumps and that was the size of it.

RG: When you say that you got extensive fire training, what do you mean by that? I'm not familiar—

CN: Fire training which included theory, lectures, practical application. Like digging what they call cold line out in the hills; you would dig a trench...what...you know, simulated fire and we did a lot of that. Although we didn't have any...I think that we had one live fire that we practiced putting a line around and that was the extent of it.

RG: What was your first jump like?

CN: I can still remember my first jump. It was out of the Travel Air, which was a small, single engine, early-day plane. And the spotter was Dave Owen, who was subsequently the ranger at Nine Mile and then he went on they all swear...I don't know where he is now. But the...it was very vivid in my mind even though I think the first two or three jumps I was kind of numb. And then it started to set in, and I noticed more things and became aware of more things in the subsequent jumps after that. On the first jump, we had a huge jump spot and there was very

little required handling of the parachute. You could, more or less, hit the jump spot without, you know, guiding the parachute by the Derry slots. You know, by pulling the line and turning the parachute. And, I guess, they figured on the first jump that was desirable because people would be not really paying too much attention to steering the parachute. And I came in with a gust of wind and it kind of came in sideways and hurt my knee, but I didn't, you know, let on. I continued on with the training and it healed up okay, and I didn't have any problem with it.

RG: What altitude did you jump from for your first jump?

CN: About 1,000 feet above the terrain—the surface of the terrain.

RG: Is that the standard altitude for jumping?

CN: Right. From 1,000 to 1,200 feet.

RG: Is the role of the spotter pretty important?

CN: The role of the spotter is very important—extremely important. The spotter is in charge of the airplane and their duty is to guide the aircraft to the fire location. And this takes expert map reading because you have to be able to see the terrain—wilderness type terrain and know where you are at all times on a map just from the drainages, mountains, and topography that you see. Usually, the old-time pilots had a real good idea of the general area, and they could get you in there quick—close. Then the spotter, once he found the fire, it would be a...usually on a two-man fire there'd be a trickle of smoke coming up somewhere, and quite often it would be hard to see, so you'd fly around the general area. And usually, a good trick on picking up the smoke source would be to get the smoke between yourself and the sun. And then it would show up quite well. And once he located the fire and determined that that was the correct one; sometimes there would be four and five in the same general area. He'd have to determine if that was the correct one. He would line out the jumpers, give them the necessary information on the...where the jump spot was, where he was going to drop the cargo, which might be in a different location. He would give them information on how to get out, in other words, where they would go from the fire to the nearest trail or to the nearest helicopter spot. And then he would drop a couple of drift steamers to find out the direction of drift—the velocity of drift of the wind right over the jump spot.

And if it looked like a good prospect, wind wise and so forth, and it was close enough to the fire, and was safe enough. There were no hazards like snags or large rock fields or something like that. He would determine from the streamers what the wind drift was, then get the jumpers in the door. In the smaller, like the Travel Air for a two-man fire, there'd be one jumper going out at a time. And in the old Travel Air, he would position himself between the jumper and the tail of the aircraft, looking out the door and straight down and giving a hand signal to the pilot which way to go. Because the pilot would be above the fire and he wouldn't be able to see quite...And he would be concentrating on holding altitude and cutting the air speed of the

aircraft down, especially when it's just about time for the jumper to go out. And then the spotter would give the signal to the pilot to cut the engines so that the jumper could go out without a blast of wind. And then he would hit the jumper on the back, and he would go out. And it was his responsibility to check to make sure that he was hooked up properly—the static line and all that. And then he'd make a second round and the next jumper would go out. And then he would go ahead and drop the gear that they would be using on the fire; and the food; and a pair of climbing spurs if necessary—if anything hung up in a tree—and the water and cross-cut saw or chainsaw, depending on the size of the fire. And then he would make sure that he received a signal from the jumpers, which was usually in the form of an L. If one jumper was, say, off by himself, that meant that he was okay. In the form of a double-L, which meant that both jumpers were okay. and that he was cleared to leave the scene and go back to Missoula or the base, as the case may be.

RG: They would make the L's and double-L's out of some type of crepe material?

CN: Right. Crepe paper—orange. That was carried in the jump pocket on the side of the jumpsuit, along with a letdown rope for coming down out of the trees if they were hung up.

RG: Did you ever work as a spotter?

CN: Right. Right. I did. I worked as a spotter for a number of years. And it was an exacting job and it was hard to...It was a matter of judgement, and experience seemed to be the best teacher on the particular job. And every once and a while a situation would come up that just would defy any rational decision making, because there would be factors that made it kind of touchy as to whether you wanted to go; there'd either be high wind, or a bad jump spot, or some other factors that made it risky. And so it was always a matter of judgement. A spotter could go further away from the fire and pick out a better jump spot, or they could even get to a near-by landing field and land there and say, wait for an hour or so until maybe the conditions changed at the fire. The winds died down, or some such matter. And you could call back to Missoula and relay the information that you were waiting for a while, or whatever.

RG: That's interesting. What kind of equipment would a smokejumper carry into a fire?

CN: The equipment that was dropped usually consisted of a pulaski, which is a hoe on one end and an axe on the other end and it's proven to be an excellent fire line trenching tool. And the hoe end—you can dig the trench down to mineral soil and the axe portion to cut limbs and brush and so forth out of the way. In addition to that, a small shovel; a cross-cut saw, or, in some cases, a chain saw; and first aid kit could be dropped if one was signaled for, but it normally wasn't standard gear. In addition, you had your own personal gear, which consisted of a personal gear bag you attached right underneath the reserve parachute. And you could carry a change of clothes, and extra socks, and maybe some favorite items of food, and so forth—like that. And then you, of course, had your two parachutes and the jump suit and by the time all of this was packed out, or packed up, and ready to come out, you had...getting close to 90 to 100

pounds. Especially if you had a chain saw. So, it would be quite heavy.

RG: Did it ever vary—did the kind of equipment that you carried ever vary, or was it a pretty standard...is this a pretty standard—

CN: It did vary somewhat, depending on the size of the fire and where the fire was. In the '60s, they were working with trenchers, that's kind of a mechanized flail—chain flail system—motorized that would flail out dirt and these were...worked pretty good on grass-type fires, in open country. And they would send those along, say like down the Salmon River, where you had that type of country, and they...Occasionally they, like I say, the chain saw was dropped. And other than that, if it was a real large fire, then larger mechanized equipment would come in.

RG: Can you describe the sequence of events from the time that you would touch the ground through fighting the fire to when you would get back to the base?

CN: Okay. After getting on the ground, then you...the first thing you would do would be to start taking off the gear disconnecting your parachute and getting out of your jump suit. And if you determined that you were okay and that you hadn't hurt yourself or anything like that, and your partner was on the ground in some other location, you could holler out, "Your name okay," so that he knew that you were okay, and he would do the same, "So and so okay." And you wouldn't holler this out until you were on the ground. In other words, if you hung up in a tree, you had to make your letdown, and get on the ground, make sure that you were okay. So then once you both got out of the jump suit and support and determined that each other was okay, you'd put out the double-L's. This signaled the spotter that both jumpers were okay. In the meantime, he would be dropping the gear. And you would pay particular attention where it was—where he was dropping the gear, which was very important. He may have designated a spot in the airplane, but once your down on the ground, things look totally different. And so from experience, you learn to look at things from the airplane and try to picture what they look like on the ground—directions and prominent features. At any rate, he would drop the gear and if you had any chance at all to get in a position to seeing where it was—the stuff was actually landing—it could save you many hours of work and possibly not losing something. And so he would complete dropping the gear and the jumpers would disconnect their personal gear bag from the...their harness and put that on their back and go toward the gear.

And once they got to the gear site, which may or may not be in direct proximity to where they jumped, they would then find the gear and all of the gear that they use are in these big, what they call, elephant bags, and it contains the tools and everything that they'll use on the fire. And then they'll find the water, usually a 5-gallon plastic container of water—dropped separately. And the spurs, if they need them to retrieve some other gear. And once they've retrieved everything and got everything that they need, then they put this on their back and head directly to the fire. And they try to do this fairly fast, because the faster they can get to the fire, the more work they're going to save themselves. And, so, when they get to the fire,

usually the first thing you do is to walk around it and take a look and see how big it is and whether it might be increasing it's size fast on one side or racing up a grass slope someplace. So then you would concentrate on where it was moving the fastest or where it was most dangerous. And trying to get the line dug around it and stop it's advance. And once you did this, then you could go around and complete the fire line around the rest of the fire. And once you had the fire line completed around the fire and it looked like that it was going to be contained and not jump the fire line or anything, then things were a lot more relaxed. The pressure was off a little bit then. And next comes the mop-up stage, which involves going through the fire, inch by inch, and putting it out by mixing it with mineral soil, or if you happen to have water, to mix it with water and put it out completely.

RG: You'd use the water that was dropped—

CN: No. As a matter of fact, if it looked like there was a good water chance, the spotter would drop a small hand pump, which consisted of a 5-gallon water bag and a trombone pump that you would work in this fashion. It would pump the water out of 5 gallons that you had on your back—and had straps. And just a small spray would come out, and it was...it used water very sparingly, but it was very effective in mopping up a fire and cooling it down. And while one person sprayed the fire, another could be churning the coals and ashes over and it was an effective way to do the mop up. And more than one time a fire has started up after Forest Service or jumper personnel has left the scene. And so, it was very important to make sure that every smoke was—and every hot-spot was—put out completely because they have a tendency from just the smallest spark to gradually build up an intensity and then start going into a root, and then either go under the fire line or building up into such a force that it was hot enough to carry a spark over the fire line long after everybody had left. And so, a real important phase was...is the mop up, but it's the most boring and the most tedious.

RG: Right, right. How would you get back to the base—most of the time?

CN: All right, this is usually taken care of by—between the requesting agency. For instance, say a district down on the Beaverhead called for a couple of jumpers. When he requests them, they have a special form there and they go through the whole form and included in this is specific instructions on how the jumpers will leave the fire, and where they'll go, and all phases of that. And so it's more or less predetermined how you'll co-ordinate that. You do have a particular place to go and a particular time to be there so that you can be picked up.

RG: I see. What kind of living arrangements did you have when you first started smokejumping, and did those change over the period of time that you were a smokejumper?

CN: My first year was spent in the new facility at the Aerial Fire Depot. And the living conditions were...I would rate them as excellent. We had individual rooms and there were probably two to three, or possible four jumpers in the larger rooms and it was very nice living accommodations. Excuse me.

RG: Do you want to get that? Sure.

[Interruption]

CN: In regard to the living conditions, I would rate the rooms and so forth as excellent and also, the food was very good. Especially around the base. In those days, the policy was that if...once you finished your training, you would...you were assigned to various districts—the jumpers were assigned to various districts throughout the region, and this was called project work. And as long as the fire season was not in progress, or there was very low fire incidents, the jumpers were out on project. And they would be doing anything from building fences to developing springs, or construction work around the district headquarters, or trail work, or anything that they had to do. And some of the...the best memories that I have of the early smokejumping days was project work. And one of my first projects was spent at Moose Creek, Idaho, and we built a fence around the ranger's station in at Moose Creek, and corral fence. And it was just great work and a great place to be, and I really enjoyed it. And that happened to be in 1954 and it was a very wet year with very low incidents of fires. And so we were on project all summer with very few breaks to go back to Missoula for a fire. When we were called back, it was the...I never did get out on fire. The jump list didn't go quite around to where I went out. So I was reassigned to a project up on the Flathead, which was quite a bit north of the Nez Perce, and this was a beautiful area. And I did everything from piling brush, to cooking, to everything that they happened to have. And it was getting toward the end of the fire season on this second project, and I did want to go out on a fire so I started driving back to Missoula on my weekends, which a person could do and if a fire showed up and you happened to be there, you'd increase your chances of going out. Especially myself, because I didn't have any jumps and I would have priority over the others who may have had one jump that were still back in Missoula.

So, in September—the first part of September—I did this, and I came in and there was a fire call. So, they set it up for the next morning, real early. And I remember the Ford Trimotor came into the...onto the apron very early in the morning and Bob Johnson, the—one of the, or THE original smoke jumper pilot was flying the Ford Trimotor. Eight of us loaded up onto the airplane—and I had jumped out of the Ford Trimotor before because we had used it in training—but this particular time it seemed that every piece of metal and everything was just about ready to fly apart on that old airplane. It just seemed to lumber up and just be barely moving. We went down over the Bitterroot Forest, down to a place called Scofield Mountain, and this was a fire that had been jumped on the previous night and one of...one jumper had broken an arm. Al Hammond had broken an arm. And the fire got a little bit bigger than they had expected and it was windier and very tricky conditions. And so, when we got there, I looked down and there was a huge, beautiful jump spot and it was early in the morning and there was no wind. And everything worked out quite well. It was just a matter of completely changed conditions from the night before 'till early morning. And it was just a beautiful jump and beautiful conditions. And we didn't get a hint of what they had gone through the day before, the panicky situation that they had. And...but I was still really excited and quite, you know,



there's quite a bit of stress, because you're, you know, you're doing something completely, you know. It was my first fire jump, and I can remember having a...really a splitting headache for about 3 days on that fire and trying to fight a fire and be half sick at the same time. But it was just a great time and we put out the fire and it was in a beautiful spot, and our walk out to the—on the trail—it was a short distance to a trail and then we walked out on trail to a road and was picked up by a vehicle from the Darby Ranger Station. And then they drove us in a bus back to Missoula. And so, that was the adventure on a fire for me.

RG: Huh! Sounds like a really good one. What kind of on base activities were you involved with when you weren't smokejumping? Did you have to make any repairs on the parachutes or your equipment or that kind of thing.

CN: Right. This evolved, somewhat, with the length of time that a smokejumper's been smokejumping. For instance, after you've been there for 2 or 3 then a jumper can request that he be assigned to the parachute loft. And this involves work on packing parachutes—reserves and the main parachutes—and sometimes repairs on parachutes. And also, if you desire, there are...is work around the base, just yard work; repairs. You may be assigned to the mixing plant for fire retardant, where they mix up the...they used to have...they started off with what they call borate. And that's evolved down through the years, too, and I don't know presently what they use. But several jumpers are assigned to this and they mix it and load the, what they call, the borate bombers to drop as fire retardant mixture. So, there are quite a number of projects that a person can become involved in right around the base there.

RG: Can you opt to do that kind of work instead of project work?

CN: In the early days, only the older, more experienced jumpers stayed around the base and packed parachutes and did the work around the base. All of the rest of the jumpers were sent out on project work to the outlying districts. And, in fact, today that is one of the controversies that they're having. You may have read in the newspapers about jumpers writing in. It's been a question of whether project work, and having jumpers stationed in outlying areas is more efficient than having everybody in a central location. And there's many factors to consider in that, but it's still going on.

RG: Huh! When you talked about project work, you seem to really enjoyed it. What did a lot of your contemporaries think about it? Did they also share that feeling, or—

CN: The people that I jumped with, and that started jumping during my time, I think, almost universally they enjoyed project work. There were a number of reasons that we enjoyed it so much: Number one, to stay around the base during a time of very low fire incidence was, could be very boring, and to be assigned out in the woods, into the...many times into the back areas, like Shaffer Ranger Station, or Moose Creek, or some of these real back country ranger's stations was really a different experience for most of us. And secondly, I liked it because I was learning jobs and doing interesting jobs with experienced people; and knowing, you know, that

any time if a fire took off, I could be called out and there would be no problem with, you know, just leaving whatever you were doing and going back and doing your primary job: which was fighting fires. And for these reasons, I really enjoyed the project work. And it was a good way to stay in shape. Usually, it was hard physical work and I enjoyed that. And certain jobs I especially liked, for instance: building, or maintaining trails and things of that nature, I really enjoyed.

RG: During a fire season or a smokejumping season, would you have any time off just for yourself?

CN: Right. During the fire season, you have certain days off, not necessarily Saturday and Sunday, they try and cover 7 days a week. And you would have your days off and you could opt to stay around the base and pick up a fire jump, if one happened to come along and all of the people that they had on reserve went out and you happened to be there you had a better chance of getting a fire. And you would still get holidays, and so forth, unless the fire danger was so high that they put every- body on duty. Then, of course, you were obligated to work during those times. And since I was going to school and putting myself through school, I tried to get all the overtime I could get. So, whenever there was an opportunity to get stand-by or go out on a fire or something, why I usually made myself available for it.

RG: When you did have some time, or when you did take some time off, did you often spend that with other smokejumpers? Or with other people?

CN: In the early days, I was usually on project and so, my time off I would spend a lot of it with the other jumpers. And like for instance, down at Moose Creek one weekend that I had off, I hiked down to an adjoining ranger station. It was about 15 miles down the trail, just to visit them and to see what it was like down there and then I hiked back. And another week- end I hiked up to a look-out that was manned by a man and wife near Moose Creek Ranger Station, and it was an interesting experience. They were...they stayed up there all summer, and when I happened to climb up to the look-out she was in the lookout—the wife was—and I got up to the structure, which was a tower, and it was just being swarmed with flying ants. And so, I climbed up the stairs and they were all over and I knocked at the door, and she says, "Yeah, come on in, but hurry up!" she says, "Before any of those aeronautical piss-ants come in!" [laughs] So I came in and she was really quite a character and I talked to her for a while. And her husband had gone down to a spring, and he was bringing up some water, so I talked to them and that was what I did mostly on my weekends, was that type of thing.

RG: Huh! That's real interesting. What kinds of things did you do in the other seasons of the year? When, throughout your career as a smokejumper.

CN: I went to school mostly, in the early days. My wintertime was taken up by...I went to the University. And a lot of the kids did that. I think the majority of smokejumpers I knew were going to school or...not necessarily around here, from all the states. We had smokejumpers from just about every state. And that was another interesting aspect of it: was meeting these

fellas from other areas and their...becoming acquainted with their culture, and why they were interested in smokejumping, and how they found out about it, and...This, I don't know, this might have been a factor in...One of the most attractive things about smokejumping and that was the comradery and the esprit de corps, you know, you hear about—that develops when persons of your same age and decade, you know, come by an inspiration to do something out of the ordinary and come together and experience the adventure that you experience of going out on a fire, or going on a project. And some—

[Break in audio]

RG: This is side two of an interview with Ted Nyquist on May 19, 1984 and I was...Ted was just talking about meeting and getting to know smokejumpers from various parts of the country during his career as a smokejumper. I wanted to ask him if there were very many smokejumpers who were from other parts of the country who were stationed in Missoula at the Aerial Fire Depot.

CN: The smokejumpers, I don't know as they...if a study has ever been done where most of the smokejumpers came from. Of course, it was obvious that most of them came from Montana and Idaho and the states that smokejumping activity took place in, for instance: New Mexico and Alaska and Washington and Oregon and so forth. But smokejumpers came from all over the United States, from the deep South, from the East, and from all the states in the West. And their cultures were so completely different, and they had outlooks on things that made a real delight to be their acquaintances and get to know them intimately on, you know, fires and doing...going through the adventure together.

RG: How far away was the most distant place that you—or the most distant fire that you jumped on?

CN: In 1958, I signed up for fire duty in New Mexico and that year I made 20 jumps, 18 of them fire jumps. Almost all of them in New Mexico. I've made jumps in Montana, Idaho, Washington, California, Oregon, New Mexico, Alaska, and I've been to fires in Wyoming, too. So, quite a cross section of states.

RG: Yeah, that's wonderful. Can you tell me a little about the work that you did in Yellowstone National Park at the base there?

CN: Oh, yes. The...Of course, smokejumpers had been assigned to Yellowstone Park for many years. I don't know really when it started, but a small contingent had been assigned to Yellowstone Park, and I had known about this for a long time. And in 1965, I was asked if I'd like to go to Yellowstone and take over the crew. And that was the year that they were moving out of the old facility, which happened to be a hanger right in West Yellowstone. Maybe I'd better catch that.

RG: Okay.

[Interruption]

RG: Okay. I was...we were interrupted there by the phone and I'd just asked Ted about Yellowstone National Park's bases, being the only base in the country in a national park, so he's gonna tell me more about that.

CN: Right. The base at West Yellowstone had been going for some time before I arrived, but it was undergoing a change the year I arrived in 1965; from a small contingent of jumpers assigned to the old hanger building right in West Yellowstone to a new set-up, a new base that was built at the new airport about 3 mile out of town. And this new facility came along with a new arrangement of co-operating fire agencies. This included the state, the federal government, the U.S. Forest Service, Fish and Game, and Bureau of Land Management, and Bureau of Indian Affairs, and possibly some others that all contributed, oh, and of course the National Park—that all contributed monies to the base and to guarantee it's operation every summer. And so, when it was built in 1965, it so happened that we had a very poor fire year, and the crew that I had down there was called on one fire, but it so happened to be one of the highest fires that was ever jumped by smokejumpers. I think, as I remember right, they had a landing point of about 11,000 feet. I don't know if that figure is completely accurate, but it was a record at the time, and possibly it still may stand. But, at any rate, the cooperating agencies, as far as I know, that arrangement still is in existence today. And seems to be working quite well.

I went down to West Yellowstone the next year, 1966, and that turned out to be one of the biggest—[emphasis] THE biggest—fire year that we had up until that time. So, we went from a very poor year to a very, very busy year. And it was quite an interesting year in that one of the Twin Beeches that we were using lost an engine and they—the spotter and the pilot—had to make an emergency landing to an air strip just outside the park. And they dropped the jumpers and all of the fire gear, so that they could make a safe landing to this alternate base. And so we had plenty of excitement down there. We did...we also had a helicopter crash in which the pilot and passenger were...landed in snow. We had an early snow, and they were looking for some jumpers that were snowed in on the Pitchtone Plateau. And the pilot was very interested in doing a good job and trying to make contact with the jumpers. And he was always this way; he always had a sense of duty. And so, when he went out, he wasn't able to contact the...or locate the jumpers. And on the way back, apparently the helicopter iced up or something. I don't know, really, completely what happened. But at any rate, it went in upside down, and landed in the snow. And the pilot, Bob Schellinger, and the observer, Harry Clark, both came out of it with some injuries, but they were able to walk out and did turn out okay.

RG: That's amazing. Huh! So, you were just responsible for jumping on fires within the Yellowstone Park area.

CN: No. Through all the co-operating agencies. And so this took us in the Park and to other outlying areas around the Park. So, we did, I think, make jumps on most of the co-operating agencies' land in 1966. So, most everybody, I think, got their money's worth that year.

RG: Huh! Would you say that the base is successful, then, at Yellowstone?

CN: From what I understand, they've had some very active years, and it appears that it's been very successful. But I've been gone for so long I really don't have information as to what it's...how it's really panning out.

RG: Were the fire management policies any different there than they were at any other of the bases that you've worked on?

CN: Yes. They—the fire management policies—were quite different in the national park. One of the differences were, we had to be very careful about the use of mechanized equipment in the park. For instance, if we could be the fire out without mechanized equipment, that was highly recommended. And we only used, for instance, the chain saw if it was a dire emergency. And they tried to keep the Park as pristine and natural and not make intrusions with noise and other elements of firefighting that sometimes occur for this reason. So, quite often we questioned it from the standpoint that we sometimes like to have a chain saw when we were just given a crosscut. We tried to observe the...what they were trying to do in the park. And I think it probably makes a big difference to the people who use the park, so there was a...quite a difference.

RG: How many years did you work at Yellowstone.

CN: I worked just 2 years at Yellowstone.

RG: Is there any experience that you remember as being the most exciting one you had as a smokejumper?

CN: I had many exciting experiences. One particular experience turned out to be very exciting and everything turned out OK, as it were. We were at Grangeville, Idaho, and the...a fire call came in from the Nez Perce Forest to a fire called Trilby Lakes. And eight smokejumpers were dispatched, and I was the spotter, And we were using a Ford Trimotor and I remember the...we referred to ourselves as Ford 6-1, the last two digits of the number of the airplane was 6-1. And it seemed to be quite a routine flight, which took us from Grangeville directly over Elk City enroute to the Trilby Lakes fire. We had a full load of eight jumpers, and we had power saws and all of the equipment that they'd need. And right over Elk City, all of a sudden, we experienced a loud explosion and...which completely bewildered all of us. We didn't know what had happened. And right after the explosion the airplane filled up with particles of hay, which we had been hauling into Moose Creek on occasion. But the little particles of hay that'd become lodged in the woodwork all jarred loose and here was after the explosion this hay

seemed to come from everywhere. And then immediately after that, a violent vibration set up, and most of us thought that we were gonna go in.

But we still didn't know what was wrong, we had no idea what was happening to the airplane. And I had my hand...I was sitting in the co-pilot's seat and the pilot, Frank Borgeson, was sitting next to me, and I had my hand down and when I lifted it up, the end of one of my fingers was punctured and bleeding. And I looked down and the floorboards were ripped-up and I thought—for a second, I thought, maybe somebody was shooting at us. [laughs] But we looked off, as the vibration kept up, we looked off to the right side and the engine began tilting forward, and as it tilted forward, the cowling on the engine broke loose and it would fall forward and hit the prop and then slam back against the engine in a shower of sparks; every time it did that, a shower of sparks it would come out. And as it went forward, it severed the line from the gas tank to the engine and I can still remember being close to panic seeing those showers of sparks and the gas just shooting out of the line and then vaporizing towards the rear of the plane. And so, all of this time the vibration was still going and it was a violent vibration. The engine kept coming forward, breaking itself off of its mountings. And after it fell forward a certain amount, the prop struck the top of the tire and just chopped the top of the tire right off and there was just a big gap there with a...It didn't blow the tire out; it just took all of the rubber right off the top. And right after that, it completely broke away from the airplane and tumbled down to the ground. Then the vibrations stopped completely. And I still had no idea what happened.

And so while I was watching this, I...it had suddenly occurred to me that the jumpers should leave the plane and get out. And when I turned around to—and got up to do the orderly arrangement of exiting the aircraft—I turned around to witness the last two jumpers going out. And I remember looking around and seeing a hard...a helmet that was in the way and it was kicked right out the door. And the jumpers were hooking up their static lines as they were moving down the aisle, moving out the door—some with helmets, some without. So, I went back and like a spotter should, pulled all the static lines back in the airplane. And then I started to put an emergency parachute on. It was on a rack that we had there, and I got it about halfway on and the pilot, Frank Borgeson, turned around and looked at me—and I can still remember the look that he gave me—and it was...his face was white, and he shouted to me. He says, "Move the gear!" And so I had to make a decision right there: whether I was gonna go out of the airplane or hang with it. And things seemed to have quieted down quite a bit because the vibration was no longer there, so I decided to put the parachute back and started moving gear. And it didn't take me long, and then I moved back up to the front again. And I got on the airnet radio, we had two radio nets: one was the airnet for all aircraft flying in Region 1 and I had a forest net for the particular forest that we was on—the Nez Perce. Well, on the airnet, I could contact back to Grangeville, and so I got on the airnet. And I gave the call to our base and was about to explain that we were in an emergency and the foreman there, my immediate boss, says, "Hold one." which meant that he was busy, and he set the mic up and I couldn't say anything. He had the radio so I couldn't say anything.

So then I didn't know, you know, I couldn't wait very long for him to get over his conversation or whatever he was doing, so I got on the forestnet and I said, "Mayday! Mayday! Mayday!" Which is the call for being in distress. And I said that we had lost an engine and we were going to attempt a landing in the Elk City mill yard, which is a sawmill with logs on both sides and a runway which apparently was used by small private craft from that area, unbeknownst to me. It just looked like a long place that we could put in somewhere, at the time I had no idea that it was a runway. So Frank bought the aircraft around and it seemed to come in fairly low. We just barely cleared a fence and as we were coming in a forest personnel from the district there at Elk City had received the call—my mayday call—and we had just...It was a very short time. We had just time to make one turn and he had taken the fire extinguisher from his car and was running across the field to where we were going to land. So, he reacted very quickly. And we cleared the fence and landed and as soon as we landed, the tire that the prop had chopped off completely blew out. And we then went into a spin on the runway and did a complete 360 and came to a stop right side up. And Frank and I grabbed each other and held each other, and then I said, "Frank, let's get out of here! This thing might blow up!" We still had no idea what happened. So Frank and I got out of the airplane and started looking around and saw a hole through the fuselage that went in one side, up through the other side and of course the control cables for the Ford Trimotor are on the outside of the airplane. It's a primitive aircraft. And they were somewhat bent, but not severed. And then there was another hole up through the wing that narrowly missed the wing tank there and then on out.

And after we looked at it for quite a while we finally deduced that it was the end of the prop that had come off at high speed and went through the aircraft and up through the wing. Well, in just a few minutes here come all the jumpers out of the woods and timber dragging their parachutes, and one jumper—I still remember his name, Locklear—had been sitting on a chain saw box exactly where the prop went through and for some unknown reason, got up and moved back to where the rest of the jumpers were, or he'd a most certainly been...perished right there. But he just got up just before and moved. And another adjunct to this story was that the Forest Supervisor was in the area at the time and he was with some mining people on an inspection tour and he happened to be talking to another miner, or a person that he was accompanying, and he said, "There goes the Ford Trimotor" he said, "on its way to a fire. That's a very old airplane, but it's certainly one of the most reliable airplanes that's ever been used for this type of work, one of the best suited." And just after he said that, he heard the explosion, saw the object tumbling from the sky and couldn't believe that he had just uttered those words. [laughs] And so he hopped in his car and came over and he was there shortly thereafter and that was one of the people in the picture. Another adjunct was the worker at the sawmill who was working a large clam shell, which lifts logs, heard the explosion looked up and saw the engine fall and it came and fell in a creek next to him. And he didn't know quite what to make of that. [laughs] So, we all got together and realized that we had come through something that could have been very, very serious and in fact, sometimes I still think about it and once and a while I'll dream about it coming—two people coming down on one parachute, things of that nature. And we got together, and we had a...it was kind of a heart-felt occasion we went and ate at Elk City's only...one of their only restaurants and had a very jovial time going back to

Grangeville, and that was the adventure of the Trilby Lakes fire.

RG: That's wonderful. Well, I'd like to thank Ted Nyquist for sharing all these experiences with me, and this is the end of this tape.

[End of Interview]