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Interviewee: Clyde Earl Schmidt

Interviewer: Gregg Phifer

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Gregg Phifer: This is Gregg Phifer of the College of Communication of Florida State University in Tallahassee, and today I'm interviewing—

Earl Schmidt: Earl Schmidt from Biglerville, Pennsylvania.

GP: One of the Pennsylvania finks. We used to call them Pennsylvania Quakers, no? What's your religious background?

ES: Religious background is Mennonite.

GP: The largest single group in CPS [Civilian Public Service] by a long shot, and a pretty sizeable number of those in CPS 103. We were, of course, a Mennonite unit here at 103, weren't we?

ES: Yes.

GP: Did you have any trouble at all, in getting the 4-E classification?

ES: No, I was fortunate in getting the 4-E classification in a Mennonite community in Illinois where we were well-known—in Eureka, Illinois—and had little or no trouble. I simply appeared before the board.

GP: In general, that seems to be the experience of most of the people from the historic peace churches: the Mennonites, Brethren, Quakers. Even though we Methodists sent about as many men to CPS as did the Quakers, nevertheless, many Methodists had to go to appeal at one level or another before getting into CPS.

All right, what year did this occur? What year was this in?

ES: I entered camp in January the 7th, 1942.

GP: 1942, January the 7th. What camp was this?

ES: Henry, Illinois, about 40 miles north of Peoria.

GP: Was it called Henry?

ES: Yes, it was Camp Henry—

GP: Camp Henry.

ES: —Number 22.

GP: Number 22. What was the project there?

ES: The project was primarily soil conservation. My work was foreman of a survey gang, and we were doing the preliminary work toward the planning for the conservation work on the various individual farms.

GP: Well, that was good exercise. You came out of a farm background yourself, did you?

ES: Yes, a small farm in Kansas.

GP: Small farm, so you really were ready for the project work. How did you come to apply for the smokejumpers?

ES: Well, I suppose there was a small amount of aviation interest in my background, but it looked like a project where a person could provide a good service with a small amount of...an amount of personal danger which appealed to me to a certain extent.

GP: I wonder if you, or any of the men from your camp, had applied earlier for the smokejumper unit?

ES: None had applied earlier than I had, because within two days after I heard that it was possible I sent a letter in to the National Service Board and got a reply to wait on the formal application.

GP: That was pretty fast work, I would say. This is 1940? Well, my, you must have come with the first unit?

ES: I was with the first unit here at Seeley Lake, yes. Not the first 12 who were riggers, but the first of those who came as regular jumpers.

GP: Regular jumpers, 1943. How many years were you here with the smokejumpers?

ES: I was here almost the full length of the smokejumper unit from April the 27th, '43, until about the last day of January, '45...or of, I'm sorry, December of '45.

GP: December of '45. Somebody closed up 103 out of the Savenac nursery, I guess, in January. So you still were about as long with the smokejumper—CPS smokejumper unit—as anyone.

Okay, so you applied for the smokejumpers, and you were transferred from your home camp there in Henry—

ES: No, sorry, I had gone to Downey, Idaho.

GP: What was the project like in Downey?

ES: Well, the project there was largely with irrigation—improving irrigation projects there—facing the dam with rock and doing some ditch work, and I was foreman of a crew there.

GP: Now, both of those are Mennonite camps?

ES: Yes, yes, that's correct.

GP: You transferred to a third Mennonite camp, which was CPS 103. Now, we're ready from Downey to Missoula?

ES: Right.

GP: Okay. Downey to Missoula. You came in by train, did you?

ES: By train with Walt Bowler (?) and Asa Mendel (?).

GP: And the Forest Service met you there in Missoula?

ES: Yes, this is right.

GP: Took you Seeley lake, or where'd you go first?

ES: To Seeley Lake.

GP: Seeley Lake was a training location for that camp and that group of jumpers in 1943. We're sitting in that same location as we make the interview today, and I suppose there are some changes but still it must be a familiar sight to you.

ES: I feel very much at home here. Feel like going back to the original time in a way.

GP: You got your training jumps in the same location, is that right?

ES: No, about four miles north of here.

GP: Oh yes, of course, I mean the same location, meaning the airfield out of here out of here, out of Seeley Lake. Before we get to the jumps though, how about the training period? There

was a very sizable training. I saw some of that on film the other night, some that I did not do myself. I never climbed the top of a long, long rope, but that was a pretty strenuous training program, wasn't it?

ES: That was. In fact, I doubt that I ever reached the top of the rope. It was strenuous, it was very good. I think it was very well handled and appreciated.

GP: But you were ready for it? You were physically ready for it?

ES: Physically ready for it, yes.

GP: Good. Was there any part you remember particularly that was...Oh, I remember the tower jump, for example, which shocked me every time I jumped off that thing. I felt it would tear me apart.

ES: Fortunately, our tower here was not quite as rough as the one at Ninemile. So it was quite a thrill. That first jump was quite a thrill, but it was not as rough as what you experienced. I tried it later, so I know [unintelligible].

GP: Oh, you tried the one at Ninemile. You tried it just to see what it was like?

ES: Yes, just see what it was like.

GP: All right, we get through the training period and get up to the jumping period. You remember your first jump?

ES: Indeed I do.

GP: Tell me about it.

ES: The first jump, when I left the plane, the chute opened a little bit slower, and I remember each one of the strings breaking that held the chute pack together. I could feel each one distinctly, which surprised me that it worked. Quite an enjoyable jump, and I landed alongside a rock that I still picture, which was very enjoyable.

GP: You enjoyed landing beside a rock. I think you enjoyed it much more than landing on that rock.

ES: [laughs] Indeed.

GP: During that first jump, did you have a sense, really, of directing your chute and deciding where you were going to land?

ES: I might mention the first thing I thought of is what it's like took down 1,000 feet with nothing under me. So, I tipped myself forward and looked down. Surprisingly, there was no fear. Rather a pleasant experience. After that, I was too busy to think about anything other than guiding the chute and trying to land in a reasonable place.

GP: I'm not sure that I didn't very much guiding on that first job. Now, by the third or fourth, I was a little bit better. In fact, on the third jump—if I remember correctly—I draped my chute across that X they made in the middle of the landing field. I didn't do any others, but that was the third jump at least.

ES: Congratulations! You'll never forget that!

GP: You went through seven jumps?

ES: Correct.

GP: No injuries.

ES: Sprained ankle that didn't amount to nothing.

GP: Sprained ankle. Which jump was this?

ES: I beg your pardon. No, that was during the summer. It was later, I'm sorry.

GP: You went through the training jumps, really, with no injuries?

ES: That's correct, yes.

GP: Is there any one of those jumps after the first one that you remember particularly?

ES: I remember the fourth one, my nerves were starting to cut up a little bit, but after the fourth one it settled down and no problem. Instead of the first, the fourth one did bother a little bit more than the first one, and I don't know why. Perhaps seeing, I think, a couple of the fellows get banged up a little bit had something to do with it. It seems to me [unintelligible] was there the first year, and I think he got his leg broke and probably I thought of that. But after that it settled down to very little problem.

GP: Did any of the men in your particular group have a line-over or have to break out the emergency chute?

ES: I don't recall that they did that year. Wes Kern [Albert Wesley Kern]—I have a good picture of Wes Kern's [unintelligible] parachute, and it was fouled up. He had popped his emergency. It wrapped up around his face, and he couldn't see that. Couldn't see anything. He landed about

ten feet from a wire fence, and about 15 inches from about a 15-inch rock that wouldn't have done him any good if he would have hit it. I can't say what jump it was or just when, but I do have a picture of the [unintelligible].

GP: Yes, I think all of us can talk about individual jumps in which we were lucky to miss something that would have resulted in a pretty serious injury of one kind or another. So you got through with the seven training jumps and qualified as a jumper. What did you do between that time, and the time you were called out for your first jump? 1943 was not a period of high fire danger and high fire jumping, right?

ES: You are right. Well, on June the 20th, they picked us up in a Trimotor [Ford Trimotor], and took us northeast about 30 miles to Seeley Lake...to Basin Creek, sorry, where we built fence for six weeks—jack rail fence—then back to Big Prairie [Ranger Station] for the summer. Interesting summer, one fire jump, and then building a bridge during the fall.

GP: Where was that bridge?

ES: That bridge was across the South Fork of the Flathead River for the use of the pack-strings in the spring when the water got high, and, occasionally, for the one wagon that they had in there—the one piece of mobile equipment that they had.

GP: We did a lot of bridge work, I remember one winter I worked out at Louisville, Montana, on a bridge. We didn't complete it. I understand the German prisoners of war completed it later on.

So that first year you really had only one fire jump?

ES: Only one fire jump.

GP: Did they give you any refresher jumps or any jumps otherwise, aside from the training?

ES: Yes, I had 2 jumps at Big Prairie landing field there, and both of those very enjoyable. One alongside the field, the other one toward the middle where I was a little closer to where I should have been.

GP: You had ten jumps that first year then, right?

ES: Yes, right.

GP: How about hanging up? I remember on my fourth or fifth jump, whichever one it was, they instructed us to head for the trees. These were not huge trees, but big enough so that our chute would hang up there, and we would hang up and have to use a standard let-down procedure. Did you hang up on any of these early jumps?

ES: I hung up on the first fire jump, yes. Oh, probably 50 feet in the air. A nice yellow pine that I was able to let myself down quite easily.

GP: You used the [unintelligible] let-down procedures.

ES: Standard let-down.

GP: Good for you.

ES: Worked all right too.

GP: I think I would have had a hard time with it. I remember sweating and sweating and sweating up there, going through that procedure. I'm not sure I ever really mastered it. You did very well to get down that way.

All right, that's a first year. That winter, what you do after a fire season was over?

ES: I went to Clark Fork, Idaho, and lived in tents on wooden platforms and built access road for...access for fire.

GP: Get cold during the winter?

ES: Not too bad where we were compared to what I've heard some others experienced. As I recall, 12 above [Fahrenheit] was the coldest we got without too much wind.

GP: Twelve above would seem very high to anyone like myself from Florida. We get down once every ten years, or something like 10 or 12 above, but not very often.

ES: Eastern Montana that would be like summer.

GP: I expect it probably would.

You got through your first year. Then you went back when the fire season was beginning to get ready—when they were getting the training and refresher jumps for the second year. Go back to nine mile for that purpose?

ES: Correct.

GP: You were there then doing your refresher jumps at the time when I was doing my training there at Ninemile.

ES: That's right. That's when I first met you.

GP: A couple of refresher jumps in there at Ninemile, and then what?

ES: Well, let's see...Then to Big Prairie again for two weeks, and then back to Seeley Lake for the summer. Again, one more jump—one more fire jump.

GP: You mean, the second year, you had only one fire jump?

ES: Yes, this is right.

GP: You were in the wrong place.

ES: [laughs] Right?

GP: I was jumping out of Ninemile, and I didn't think I got very many, but I got three fire jumps, 1944 it was. You were shorted on fire jumps, weren't you?

ES: I was. This is right.

GP: Deprived.

ES: However, that was the year I sprained my ankle, and I missed one jump at Chelan, Washington, which got quite a bit of publicity. So, I didn't get to make that because of a sprained ankle.

GP: I've heard a man talk about that particular fire up at Chelan. Must have been very nice. I remember I was supposed to be on the rotation to go to Glacier National Park. I felt very bad when they had to cop out of that. My boots were being repaired at the time, so I didn't have any to wear.

ES: Barefoot in Glacier Park would not be so good [unintelligible].

GP: Not very good, but the next day I was in some much less romantic place than Glacier National Park.

Now, after the second year then, when you didn't get a great many jumps...at Big Prairie again?

ES: Big Prairie again for two weeks. Actually, at Big Salmon Lake [unintelligible] trail maintenance [unintelligible].

GP: Now, those trails, I guess, initially had been built primarily by the CCC boys, in the old days—1930s. Had they?

ES: I suspect that is correct. I'm not sure.

GP: Then you were in the process of repairing and maintaining those trails?

ES: Correct, along with [unintelligible], a very experienced Forest Service man. Native of Finland.

GP: Both of us know that many of those backcountry trails were in pretty bad shape. If you tried to walk out of those trails or if you tried to carry anybody who was injured out over those trails, you know that the downed timber and all the rest made them pretty hard to handle. Then the winter of 44—

ES: The winter of '44 was the [unintelligible] Ranger Station at Priest River, Idaho, Metaline Falls, Washington, and a month then, in the spring, as Priest River Experiment Station at Priest River.

GP: Got around, didn't you?

ES: A little bit.

GP: More than most the rest of us did, that's sure.

ES: A lot different than what I was used to for a boy from a farm in Kansas [unintelligible].

GP: Quite different country, isn't it, the high country? Did you like that high country?

ES: I enjoyed it very much. We always did enjoy high...Now, don't misunderstand me, and I don't I want any rock-mountain climbing.

GP: You don't?

ES: [laughs] No, but high country is very good. I might mention one other thing too—

GP: Yes, please do.

ES: —a person wonders whether, next spring, what do you think about that first jump in the spring? You have to rethink that again. This was starting to bother me a little that year, and one night I had a dream that I jumped and landed on Jumbo Mountain just out of Missoula. I dreamed the whole thing from the plane to the ground, and the roll and everything. After that I had it licked, and there was not much problem to go back and do my training again.

GP: I remember when I made my training jumps, my third one...People were back for their refresher jumps, and they said, "Look here jumping us from 1,500 or 2,000, nothing to that. Take us up to 3,000." So they did.

ES: They did?

GP: They took us up to 3,000 or maybe a little bit more, and we had a longer ride than usual. That was my third jump, and it was with them. I was probably eighth, or ninth, or tenth, to eleventh.

ES: Lucky duck.

GP: That's right. You never had that high?

ES: No.

GP: Well, on many of the fires, I suspect they were jumping us more like 1,000, 1,200, because they wanted us to get down as close as we could to a good location to land, rather than being swept off into some snags or into some rock piles.

Let's see, we got through your second year, and you had only one fire jump each of the first two years. Now 1945, in the history of the CPS smokejumpers, was the year for jumping. Did you get some?

ES: I came out better.

GP: How much better?

ES: Well, three that year, but I'll get into that a little bit later as to why I stopped at three. Three of those, the first one near Shearer Landing Field, came back up from Shearer, which is southwest of Missoula, what, 20, 40 miles?

GP: Something like that.

ES: The second one, about ten miles east of Big Fork, which is east of...What's the name of the lake up there?

GP: [laughs] Oh my! A lake up there.

ES: Anyway, about 40 miles north of here. Then, back again to the southwest, and that was the interesting jump, as far as I'm concerned.

GP: Take the others first. We'll get to that interesting jump in a minute.

Most smokejumper jumps tend to be small fires, where the lightning has struck and set a tree, a snag, maybe a little bit duff of the ground, on fire, and somebody notices the smoke and we get there before it had a chance to grow.

ES: Right.

GP: Were your two fires like that, or were they different?

ES: Very much like that. The second one, I think, is interesting. The first one was not that much interesting. The second one was a small fire about 250 feet from the top of a ridge. I was fortunate. I just cleared the top of the ridge, went down the other side, and hardly felt the landing. One of the others hit a tree, and his chute collapsed. He sat down—it would have been Kolmer Spangler, I believe—sit down and injured his tailbone.

When we got to the fire line, the fellow said, “I saw a spring over here. I think I’m going to go get some water.” Of course, our thoughts were somewhat questionable as to how much of a spring he saw. However, his work was worth ten times what the rest of ours was, because he came back a little while later. He had located a spring, he’d put a shelter-half in, and he had a stream of water about the size of a lead pencil coming out, and that within 250 feet of a top of a ridge. I couldn’t believe it. He brought water back, and we brought water back, from that little spring, and were able to put out the fire. Because this was a very steep hillside. An ember would have rolled down the hill, and then we would put it out with water. His time was worth much more than the rest of us.

GP: You never quite know what’s going to happen on a fire, do you?

ES: Exactly.

GP: A lot of unpredictable.

ES: Right.

GP: Now, the third jump is the one which you’re going to remember a long time. Won’t you tell us about it?

ES: I’ve told a lot of people. [laughs]

GP: All right, now tell me.

ES: 4:20 in the afternoon, we got a call at Missoula at the loft, went past Wallabadah Manor, of course, to pick up a few odds and ends, and a sandwich.

GP: Wallabadah Manor is a fraternity house which was rented by the Forest Service by use by smokejumpers.

ES: And that was our nickname.

GP: Right.

ES: We went to the airfield and got a Ford. The Ford was gassing when we got our equipment and climbed into the Ford.

GP: That means eight men? Eight men?

ES: Eight men.

GP: Right.

ES: I had a headache and asked the pilot about a bag.

He says, "You won't need one."

I said, "I hope you're right."

Anyway, we got in, took off, turned to the southwest. I laid my head back and went to sleep and slept half-an-hour, and when I woke up I felt fine. Then we came within sight of a 500-acre fire, and I thought, that's where we're going? This isn't what a smokejumper wants. He wants a little one. We didn't get back [unintelligible] and go someplace else. We passed that one, passed two spot-fires out ahead, and shortly so, a small fire on the edge of a hill below a lookout. Circled the lookout once, dropped the drift-chute, and I was the first person out. For some reason, I turned toward the timber a little a little bit, hit a top of a pine tree—I judge 100 feet high—and went right down along the trunk in the chute along the outside of the limbs, and never even hung up. I dropped past the last limb on the trunk and hit some twigs on the ground. Very easy landing. Went over to the place where we gathered our equipment, and got the rest of my equipment, and went back on the fire. It was 120 miles from Missoula. It was a very interesting trip. I might mention that this is one-half mile away and one-half mile vertical from the "River of No Return" [Salmon River].

CP: Oh, my last jump was on that "River of No Return."

ES: It's a very interesting river, and it was in an area that few people get to see. I guess, that's why I like it. The fire was only a couple of acres, so we put a ring around it by dark and everybody bunked down. But the one who was guarding the fire came down and said, "I think these three fellows had better move. There's a [unintelligible] at the top of the fire that is burning, and if it comes down, it could cause a problem."

After dark, these three men had to hunt a new spot, and it had a beautiful smooth spot with pine needles on [unintelligible] to sleep. I never heard a word the next morning. The dead top of that tree was sticking straight through the center in the place where these three men had been sleeping.

We spent the morning getting this fire—

Unidentified Speaker: This rain is a smokejumper's dream, isn't it?

ES: [laughs]

GP: That's what we like to see on the fire.

ES: We got the fire reasonable out by about 1:30, and one of the groups got the equipment together for the pack-string to pick up. Some of the others were doing some other work, and two of us were left there to hunt spots. During the next hour, or so, we actually found 16 small spots of fire—hot spots—about the size of a cigarette butt. We put those out, and after that last one was out, the fire actually smelled different.

GP: I know, oh yes.

ES: So we waited another hour and started for the lookout. That can't be very far away. We just passed it just before we jumped. The only thing was, it was seven hours later that we got to the lookout. Couldn't figure out why—

GP: You had some hike.

ES: —until we looked at the map, and we had climbed one mile vertical and seven miles of trail. The lookout was a very good man who provided us with hotcakes and fried potatoes for a midnight snack, and believe me, that tasted good. So the next morning, we started for the nearest road, which was 12 and-a-half miles of ridgetop, and that a beautiful hike.

We met the truck with—thank goodness—sandwiches, and headed for Red River Ranger Station where we spent the night. The next morning, covered up in the back end of the truck with cargo parachutes from another fire, and headed for Dixie Landing Field. About nine o'clock, a Ford Trimotor came in and we loaded up, and was ready to take off. Dixie, now, is back in the backcountry. The runway is 100 feet wide and 3,200 feet long, and it's another 100 feet of grass to the fence. Well, these were Ford Trimotors, and you have to crank a Ford.

So we did, three of us. Wind up that [unintelligible] starter. Only thing was, we forgot and pulled our hands down too far, and broke the crank. Here we are at the middle of nowhere with a broken crank that we couldn't use and a very unhappy pilot.

GP: Of course [laughs] he'd be unhappy. Oh, these smokejumpers.

ES: [laughs] The English he used wouldn't be— [laughs]

GP: [laughs] You won't put this on the tape?

ES: No. [laughs] Anyway, fortunately the second plane came in, and although it had an electric starter, it also had a crank. We wound up and took off and back to Missoula by [unintelligible]. That was an interesting jump, as far as I was concerned.

GP: It must have been.

Now, you say in the summer of '45, you got only three jumps. I wonder why. Because you were away from Ninemile, away from Missoula? You suppose the station—the place you were stationed—was a cause of your getting only three jumps that third year?

ES: Unfortunately, the cause of mine went back some 20 years. I had inflammatory rheumatism and rheumatic fever. The only damage done was to my hip joint, which went bad, and x-rays said quit jumping. It got a little worse until 1976, I got a new hip joint. Now, I'm fine since. But that put an end to the jumping—to fire jumping—and I was very disappointed, as anybody would have been.

GP: Of course, after you had the three jumps there in '45. Only one in '43, and one in '44, and then three in '45, you were looking forward to more. I know I got seven, and I was by no means high for that '45 fire season.

ES: Seven was normal.

GP: Yes. After you had the orders to quit jumping, did they send you a fire tower? What'd they do?

ES: No, I stayed, just simply helped around in Missoula for a while and then out to Ninemile. Then, in the fall, went on a timber crew to White Sulphur Springs. A month or more, there.

GP: Then what?

ES: Then furlough in Oregon working in a sawmill. Then, back to Savenac Nursery—

GP: Ah, Savenac, Savenac, Savenac. I remember that so very well.

ES: So did some others.

GP: Yes, I'm sure we do.

ES: I wasn't there very long though, until I was sent to the Medaryville, Indiana, for separation. Madaryville is a nursery—another nursery. I'll tell you more about that off the record.

GP: All right, you don't want to put it on the tape?

ES: You want me to?

GP: Sure, go ahead. Don't think it will hurt anything.

ES: Well, okay. They didn't get really rich off of me sending me to Medaryville, because we took the Milwaukee into Chicago over New Year's, and then we went on to Medaryville, Indiana. I had some leave still, that I had accumulated, and the first day that I was supposed to be at work, my clothes hadn't arrived yet, so they put me in the library. The next day...No, another day, I was sick. I was very sick. Caught cold someplace along the line. I don't mean very sick, but just too sick to work. I think they got two full days out of me before the separation on the 13th, I believe, of January 1946.

GP: '46. That's a date you can remember pretty well, I guess.

ES: Fairly well, yes.

GP: All right, you are separated from the service in January of '46. Then what?

ES: I went on a cattle boat. Yes, I almost forgot that. I got one trip to Danzig, Poland, with a boatload of 795 horses [unintelligible].

GP: Did they all survive?

ES: No they didn't. Unfortunately, we lost 54 head on the way over.

GP: That's pretty good I understand, some of the boats lost 150 or more.

ES: Is that right?

GP: Yes.

ES: We had some colts that were lost. There was some colts born on the trip.

GP: This was Danzig when you came in?

ES: Pardon?

GP: That was Danzig where you—

ES: Danzig, yes.

GP: They were supposed to be intended for Germany or Poland or what?

ES: Poland.

GP: Poland?

ES: Yes. The Polish government gave us a tour of some of the Polish dairies in that area, which was really interesting. It was quite interesting to me to find a farm with one cow. They had a cot alongside. I said, "Why the cot?"

"Oh, here you sleep with your cow, or the next morning won't be there."

Everybody owned one.

GP: In the immediate post-war period, I'm sure that was quite right, quite true. You came back from that. Just one trip?

ES: Just one trip, yes.

GP: Then what?

ES: Well, then I went back home, and that summer worked bailing hay. Went to Northeastern Colorado. Then accepted a job in Southwestern Nebraska—about the same area that I got acquainted with at that time. Worked for Oswald Produce (?) for ten months. Then my brother says, "Earl, why don't you come back with me. We'll buy an airplane. We'll do a little flying," which both of us wanted to do. So I ended up working for Musselman Food Products [Musselman's] at Biglerville, Pennsylvania. We did get a plane and flew for two and-a-half years, and got a nice lot of flying.

GP: Did you use that plane in your business?

ES: No, it was mostly for play.

GP: Pleasure. Did you learn to fly then?

ES: I had done some flying out here. I got my solo at Missoula.

GP: Solo at Missoula? During the time you were a smokejumper?

ES: During the time when I was a smokejumper.

GP: That's an interesting arrangement. How did you arrange that? Were there other men working with you at the same time? Same idea?

ES: Here in Missoula? Oh yes. In fact, it was the outgrowth of the...I'm sorry, I can't say the name of it anymore/ But it was a relief-sponsored flying club that we had in mind using it in relief-work, search-work, this type of thing that got starting in that fall here at Missoula. They bought a plane and used it for several months, and I got a little flying in that. My first instructor, of course, was Bill Yaggy, who was later killed in a flying [unintelligible]. Second instructor was Jerry Verhelst, who was killed later in a Northwest Airlines accident. That didn't slow me down. I love to fly, and I got some time here, a little time in Nebraska, and then a couple hundred hours all told by the time I quit flying in Pennsylvania.

GP: What kind of a license did you acquire?

ES: Just a private. Pleasure, not only, but it did give me a kind of a zest for living that I couldn't replace some other way it seemed like.

GP: Is this right? So, you really enjoyed the flying, and part of that came out of your experience here with smokejumpers.

ES: Oh, very much so, very much so.

May I go back, and mention one other thing?

GP: Please do. Yes.

ES: I don't know how our time is coming—

GP: Please do.

ES: —but I didn't give my parents much time to give an okay on the smokejumper.

GP: Oh really?

ES: We had to get their okay for the medical reasons and the like, and I saw to it that they had just about time enough to sign their name and get it back in the mail. My parents knew pilots of earlier days, and a husband and wife who both parachute. It wasn't too long after that that unfortunately, at least the wife, was killed on a parachute jump. They had some serious questions about whether I should parachute or not, but they gave me permission and, of course, I enjoyed that very much.

To get back to Pennsylvania, I worked for 23 years for the Musselman Food Products Company. Ten years of it as a mechanic, and then—

GP: Musselman is the one that produces all the apple sauce, is it?

ES: Yes, [unintelligible].

GP: Ah, I bought Musselman applesauce, now I got you paid.

ES: Good! [laughs] One of our preferred customers. Then, I got a challenge to become an insurance agent, and I thought that would be quite a challenge. So I spent 15 more years in insurance sales, in service. Actually, five years part-time and 15 years full-time, and I have just recently retired from that. You would know it in other states as the Farm Bureau Insurance. In Pennsylvania the BFA Farmers is Pennsylvania Association Insurance. Quite a challenge, quite interesting, and I suppose, you might say, educational. That about brings it up to date.

GP: I'm sure it was. Well, looking back now at your CPS experience, and particularly the smokejumper aspect of it, do you have any final word about what it meant in your life? Was it a high-point? Was it something you look back upon with [unintelligible] pleasure, or what?

ES: Yes, indeed, it was a high-point, and I suppose that my interest in flying has helped that along. But the experiences of a flat-land farm boy in the mountains—which I'd always enjoyed reading about—in the mountains, protecting the woods, which are great value, I feel. Quite a challenge and quite a high-point of my life, I would say.

GP: If you had to go back to that base camp before you entered the smokejumpers, you would apply again?

ES: That's an interesting question, and I'm glad you asked that, because I felt that although I enjoyed this, maybe I would have contributed more to humanity in a hospital-type situation where I was dealing directly with people. Yet maybe my abilities were better used in this area, too, and I do think it was valuable. But there would be that question as to whether I would be wiser to use my talents, or whatever, in direct service to mankind or in the service of providing the material things and what. I don't know if that make sense or not.

GP: The protection of the forest. Of course, it makes sense. We always face that kind of question. I may say that people I have talked to, who went to mental hospitals, one of them lasted six months, the other lasted one year, and that was as far as they could go. The strain of working with them, under the conditions they had to work under, was just so much they could not take it. Had you gone there, you might not have lasted long.

ES: Maybe that's why I ended up here.

GP: It might be at that. Well, thanks very much. I appreciate the chance to interview you. Thank you.

ES: Thank you.

GP: Thank you very much.

[End of Interview]