

Oral History Number: 163-012

Interviewee: John Scott

Interviewer: Gregg Pfeiffer

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Project: Civilian Public Service Smokejumpers Oral History Project

John Scott: This is going to be put in the records of the...what?

Gregg Pfeiffer: Well, it's the historical project, the historical project dealing with the smokejumpers. It's an oral history project, *Smokejumper Oral History Project*, of the Mike Mansfield Library at the University of Montana. So, that's kind of the auspices of this whole thing. We have a professional interviewer going right over there with Bob Searle; really going to town, he's been going for a long time.

Well, this is Gregg Pfeiffer, a professor of communication at Florida State University doing the interviewing, and I'm talking with—

JS: John Scott.

GP: From—

JS: Fergus Falls, Minnesota.

GP: Have you always lived in Minnesota?

JS: Yes.

GP: Born and brought up in that state?

JS: Right.

GP: All right. We're going to be talking primarily about the smokejumper experience, and the CPS experience, but CPS means that the men—those of us who entered CPS [Civilian Public Service]—objected to war for somewhat religious reasons. Would you tell us just a little bit about your own religious background, if you would please?

JS: Well, I hadn't been much of a church background, until I was probably 25 years old, or along in there somewhere. My first wife passed away at that time, and I got interested in a local church, and the minister happened to be a pacifist. I guess that's maybe one thing that interested me.

GP: What was the denomination? Did it have a denomination or affiliation?

JS: That was a Presbyterian Church, and it's called the Federated Church; it's Presbyterian-Congregational.

GP: Well, the men who came here—to the smokejumpers or to CPS—from the historic peace churches: Quakers, and Brethren, and Mennonites, didn't seem to have much trouble getting the classification they asked for. How about you, when you said you didn't think it was right to go overseas to kill on behalf of our nation? What did the draft board say?

JS: I had quite a little trouble with them. I would say, probably a year and a half, or more. I kept getting classified, and appealing it—classified in 1-A, and asked for, appealing it. I finally was put again in 1-A, and appealed it, and they rejected the appeal, so to speak, but finally offered me a chance to stay home and farm. My father was 70-some years old at the time, and there were a lot of fellas that we're staying home to farm. So, I guess they figured that would get me out of their hair, so they gave me a farming classification, which I appealed, and made up my mind I was either going to go to jail or CPS. Then, they sent a federal judge up from Minneapolis or St. Paul, I believe, and he listened to my case—come clear up there for just two fellas.

GP: Really?

JS: One other man from the northern part of the state, and myself. He seemed to be a fair fellow. He was a very stern person, but he said, "I believe, from looking over your record, you've been offered a chance to farm, so I think you're sincere."

And he recommended that I be given CO...I don't remember what that—

GP: 4-E was the classification. You must have felt very strongly to reject that farming classification. I'm sure many men would have accepted that.

JS: Yeah, I did. I figured I'd been fighting it long enough, so I was getting a little tired of battling. Also, I suppose, it entered into it the fact that everybody around there—the whole area—were against that stand. I thought at least I would be among people that felt as I did. I think that was part of it. Although, I believe the religious angle of it was the important part, as far as I was concerned.

GP: That meant, of course, that you were not inducted until fairly late in the game. When was it you finally got orders to report?

JS: It was in, I would say, probably early March, '42.

GP: '42. Well, your appeal started very early then?

JS: Yes.

GP: You had an early appeal, had to appeal, appeal, appeal?

JS: Right.

GP: Finally got the classification you asked for?

JS: Right.

GP: Then you were ordered to report to camp. Where did you go?

JS: I went to CPS-59, at Elkton, Oregon.

GP: What was your project like there?

JS: Well, it was tree planting at first, and then I got on a road crew, was finally driving a Cat, Caterpillar at the time I came to smokejumpers.

GP: How long were you there at the Elkton camp? Was it Elkton, or am I wrong?

JS: No, it's Elkton. I suppose, only a little over a year, maybe 13 months, or something like that.

GP: How did you come—coming out of a farming background as you had, going out to Elkton, and driving a Cat, which I'm sure you were well qualified to do—how'd you happen to apply for the smokejumpers?

JS: Oh, I felt that fellas who went in the army were doing their bit to what they thought was right, and risking their necks. I thought if I could find something that was worthwhile that was sort of, at least similar, to what they were doing as far as danger, why, I was going to go for it. That's the reason I went for this.

GP: Had any other men you knew applied for the smokejumpers, or been accepted earlier? This would have been 1940...

JS: Three.

GP: Had any other men applied at the same time.

JS: Yes; Ed Kirk, fella from Ohio, applied that year.

GP: He was also at Elkton?

JS: Yes.

GP: So, the two of you applied, and both of you were accepted?

JS: That's right.

GP: And you didn't come with a crew to open up the camp, or did you? There were a number of people who came as riggers; to be trained as riggers first.

JS: No, I came after they had jumped quite a bit.

GP: But you came with a jumping crew; that is the people who were going to jump on fires.

JS: Yes.

GP: Okay. That's 1943, which is a first year of CPS smokejumpers, right?

JS: I must be mistaken about that; it was '44.

GP: You came the second year?

JS: I came in at '43. I suppose I must have made a mistake on the first one too; I was drafted in '43. I got my years wrong there.

GP: That's easy to understand, we're talking about '86 now, we're trying [to get] you to recall something four decades ago, and that's a very easy thing to do. At any rate, you came with the second group, up at Ninemile, not Seeley Lake. Is that right?

JS: Right?

GP: So, you were trained at Ninemile?

JS: Yes.

GP: Same place I was. Probably the same time, essentially, because I was there in 1944.

JS: Yes, I remember you.

GP: You went through with the early squads. I finally wound up with D squad after injuring my shoulder a bit. How about you in the training program? You—coming out of a farming background, and being at Elkton for a while—you were in pretty good physical condition, right?

JS: Correct.

GP: How about the training program? How'd you find it?

JS: I thought it was fine, as far as I knew. I didn't have any other training programs to compare it to—

GP: [laughs]

JS: —but I liked it. I liked the personnel—Forest Service personnel—and I thought they were, being of a different belief than we were, I thought they were real considerate.

GP: Was there any one part of a training program that stands out in your memory now? For instance, so far as I am concerned, I remember very, very well, and very vividly, that tower jump. I think that's where I hurt my shoulder, off that tower. It shook you around. You really just picked up, *bang*, and shaken over.

JS: Yes, that was kind of tough. I've heard a lot of them saying that they believe they'd just rather make a parachute jump, than to go over that tower, but it taught us something, I guess. I remember they made us, as we dropped off, they made us put a rock in one hand, and they made us put it over into the other hand on the way down, to prove that we were thinking.

GP: Or conscious, at least.

JS: Yes.

GP: Good. [laughs] You had no injuries through the seven jumps then, right? Through the training program, you had no injuries, right?

JS: Not that I know of, no.

GP: Well, you should know about it. How about jumping, when you came to that first jump, do you remember that? Is that a vivid memory or not?

JS: Yes, I suppose. You didn't know what was coming, exactly. You were certainly pretty tense over it. I can remember a wondering how it would go, but I kind of made up my mind; I'm going to do it no matter what, and it went all right. I don't know, I believe, about the fourth jump was harder than the first.

GP: Why?

JS: Well, [laughs] I have never really figured it out. Maybe you just kind of realized what you were doing by that time, and you kind of thought to yourself, What in the world am I doing up here?

GP: I think that, at the very top of a high skyscraper, looking down over that, was something to compare it...I feel the height much more than I did looking out from an airplane...and expect to jump.

JS: Yes, I agree with you there; it's a little different. You don't have anything under you except air.

GP: That's right. We used a static line all the way through, of course. We didn't make any freefall jumps, so you didn't really have to pass one stone from one hand to the other.

JS: No.

GP: Did you ever crack your emergency chute?

JS: No, I was pretty fortunate that way.

GP: No nor did I.

JS: I had a pretty good opening always.

GP: Quite a number of the men did have to use the emergency chute, although [laughs] sometimes [it's] hard to tell they did much good with it.

JS: Right.

GP: Wrapped around their faces, and tangled things up, and kept them from seeing anything, rather than anything else.

Your first jump then, wasn't so bad. The fourth jump a little bit more, and—

JS: I would say either fourth, or fifth, in there somewhere.

GP: One of those jumps, we were told to hang up in a tree. Did you do that?

JS: On the training jump?

GP: Yes, right. Told us, hang up your chute so you can use a let-down procedure.

JS: I suppose they did, but I didn't hang up. I don't know [laughs] whether I was just lucky, or...I don't remember them saying that but—

GP: Did you steer for the timber? I did. I steered for the timber.

JS: I can't remember if I did or not.

GP: Anyway, you didn't hang out through all the training jumps. Neither did I. In fact, I didn't hang up through all the 20 jumps I made, hanging up in a tree, even though I jumped into some fairly good timber.

All right, you finished the seven jumps. No injuries through that period, got along fine. Fourth jump a little tougher than the first. Any other memories now of the jumps? Was that a good feeling when you finish that seventh one, and knew you were qualified now to jump?

JS: Yes, definitely so. It was a good feeling when I finished the first. You felt like one [you want to go] back up before noon if possible.

GP: Yes. They wouldn't do that for you though.

JS: No, you had to wait then.

GP: If I remember correctly, I made my jumps one day after another, but I don't think you did. Did you, in your training group?

JS: I don't believe so. That's also hard to remember; just how far it was between them, but it didn't take too many days to finish it up.

GP: After the training program was completed, that is, you had completed your seventh jump, where did you go then?

JS: Well I'd have to think a minute on that. I believe out at Fish Creek. I'm not just sure what the project was there, whether it was—I think it was telephone line or our clearing trail—

GP: Yes, maybe a little bit of both.

JS: Pack-trail.

GP: Yes, maybe a little bit of both. I know our men, smokejumpers, did both of those as part of their projects. Well that year of '44 was not the one of heaviest smokejumper involvement. How many fire jumps did you have that year? This is '44, first of the year that you were there on the smokejumper unit.

JS: That I couldn't say for sure. I probably made four, or five—

GP: Pretty good, I made three, and that was all I got.

JS: I didn't keep any record of it, so it's pretty hard to remember.

GP: How about your first fire jump? Does that stand out in your memory?

JS: Yes, I just happened to be the first one—I and Ed Harkness—happened to be the first ones to take out that...was it SPF (Sets, Portable, Forestry) [radio]?

GP: Yes.

JS: —radio. That was the first one that they had packed in the fire pack.

GP: Yes, and it survived the drop?

JS: Yes, and we had to throw up an antenna over the branch of a tree and try and call Ninemile, and I couldn't get an answer there. So, finally, Harry Burks come in at Missoula, and he said, "You'll have to talk to Missoula; nobody out there to answer that at Ninemile." So, we got that communication through ok, for the first time.

GP: Harry had designed the dropping program. I remember, sometimes, the radios were dropped, and they were just a tinkle at the end, you had nothing to go on. Our first fire jump, Chuck Chapman tried to set up a radio, and he threw an aerial from one tree to another, but we never were able to contact anybody. It probably depended, some, upon the lay of the land.

How hard was a firefight? You talked about the radio, how about the fire itself?

JS: That was a small, very small, fire on one tree, I believe, burning when we got there—a large old snag. So, Ed Harkness and I proceeded to saw it down—we had them drop a saw—and worked on the mop up, getting it out.

GP: On my first jump, they dropped us a crosscut saw. We never found it.

JS: [laughs]

GP: As a result...We had a big tree with fire established fairly high in it, we couldn't get at it—we chopped that tree down with a double-bladed axe. Well probably a Pulaski; I don't imagine we had an axe on there.

JS: Yes, probably a Pulaski.

GP: Probably a Pulaski. So, that was one job; chewing away at that tree with an axe. You were lucky to have a good crosscut saw in that one.

That was a small one. Were the rest of your fires that same way, or did you get on a big campaign fire?

JS: Some of them were multiple drops, where they had a couple, or three plane-loads. There again, it's hard for me to distinguish which number was the certain fires, and I can't remember the names of most of them.

GP: You didn't get in on that big campaign fire—29 jumpers in Bell Lake—did you?

JS: Yes, I was.

GP: You were on that?

JS: Yes, I think that was one of the later jumps. That was kind of an airshow; there was men dropping all over, and Forest Service personnel flying around above looking it over. I can remember it Earl Spicer smacked his face on, into a rock...solid rock wall there. I thought he would surely be injured, but I believe he had to sit around a while to regain his strength, but he was all right, I guess.

GP: I should think so. Do you remember where you were dropped in that particular incident? One man, on that Creek, on that particular fire, the Bell Lake fire, tells me he was dropped directly over the lake, and they expected the wind to blow him between the lake and the fire itself.

JS: Yes, I believe it was that way. I know one of them was. That water looked kind of dangerous down there, but I landed where I was supposed to. I don't remember the exact location, but it wasn't too far from the fire, I know.

GP: You don't mean to tell me you didn't have some inflatable vest, or something, to fight the water with if you should've dropped in a lake?

JS: [laughs] No. Not that I remember.

GP: No, we didn't have anything like that. It's pretty bad to drop into the water then, and they were pretty careful not to do so, but the wind was so changeable, and sometimes you couldn't quite be sure where we were going.

JS: No. They finally, I believe, developed a release that released your chute from you. I don't think very many people got that harness with that on, but—

GP: Had you used it at all?

JS: No.

GP: The quick release. I've heard about it, but I didn't know of any CPS jumpers having used that quick-release harness.

JS: They probably didn't, but I know they demonstrated, or somebody showed it to me in the loft or somewhere; you hit a button there, and it let go of the chute. That would have been a pretty good deal if you happened to be in a lake.

GP: It certainly would. I'd hate to try to get out of their equipment we had with the—

JS: Yes.

GP: —underwater.

JS: When that suit got soaked up, you didn't have much chance.

GP: Not much of a chance. During that first year did you hang up in a tree on any of the jumps?

JS: No, I was always on my feet on the ground when I—

GP: Lucky.

JS: I might have had the chute caught a little bit in the lower branches, or something, and I don't think it was all due to being a smart maneuverer. I think I just lucked out in a lot of cases.

GP: I suspect luck, or a good angel watching over us, [laughs] might have helped, because, a lot of the time, it was not a matter of skill on our part. I'm sure of that.

Well, you had then, the wide variety, because that first year in 1944, you had the first fire, that two-man fire were you and Ed Harkness dropped in and took care of a snag, eventually. I remember jumping in after Ed myself, on a later fire, when he broke his ankle. Had to be taken out by a pack train. I jumped immediately after him on that particular fire. You had that extremes then, of a two-man fire, and also of the largest campaign fire of 1944: the Bell Lake fire. 29 people, that's a pretty good campaign fire, isn't it? Did you finally control that Bell Lake fire?

JS: Yes, I don't remember just how long we were there, but I can remember walking out, and it was a long walk. I believe eight or ten miles if I remember right.

GP: Shouldn't be surprised. However, I must say, that sometimes a length of walk out grows a little bit as my story advances. I remember one long hike out, and I don't know how far it was really, but it became 15 or 16 miles, and I think my latest one was 37 miles out. That's a slight exaggeration, probably.

JS: Yes.

GP: During the first year, at least, you were never sent in as a rescue unit for anyone, were you?

JS: I don't believe so. I was on a rescue—

GP: All right, tell us about that. That was probably the second year: '45.

JS: I think it was the second year, and Oliver Hughes had had a chute caught in the top of this tree, and the top broke off, as I remember it, and he came down through the branches, and was pretty badly injured. In fact, at this time, he doesn't remember anything that went on there for, I guess, several days.

GP: Had a concussion. What did you do then?

JS: We jumped in there, and proceeded to get him on the stretcher, and started down the pack trail, which is not too pleasurable. The people on top side of the stretcher, are reaching way down, and the one on the bottom, he's reaching over his head, to keep him level.

GP: I know that experience, because I helped carry a man out earlier. How far did you have to carry him?

JS: That, again, is—

GP: Several miles?

JS: —I wouldn't want to stretch it. [laughs]

GP: Well let's not stretch it.

JS: It was at least—

GP: Twenty miles, 30 miles.

JS: [laughs] It was at least six miles, and it may have been eight. I don't remember.

GP: You were able to get him to a road where the Forest Service pick-up would pick him up, and get him to the hospital.

JS: Yes.

GP: He had a pretty severe concussion.

He tells us, by the way, that when he finally woke up there, and the nurse asked him what had happened, he said, "I was in a boxing match."

JS: Yes. [laughs] I guess he kind of went blank.

GP: I should think so.

That was your first year. In between terms—between the 1944 and '45 fire seasons—what did you do?

JS: That would be the year that I was up in Metaline Falls, [Washington] and Priest River, Idaho: False [Peak] Ranger Station, Priest River, Idaho. We were cutting what they called weed trees; they were hemlock. At that time they were considered weed trees. I believe now they save it all, and kiln dry it, and use [them], but we cut them and burned them, if we could get them to burn. We did some trail maintenance, and a little telephone-line maintenance in the forest. I guess that about sums it up for that winter. I don't think I moved from one place to the other there. Maybe from Metaline...I don't know, just kind of fades from my memory how far apart those two places were, but they were up in the northern part of Idaho, and a little bit in Washington too.

GP: Do you remember anything about living conditions there?

JS: We had a little individual bunkhouses that were about five or six men to a bunkhouse. I think we had about three of them, plus a house—sort of a ranger station-type house, and the cook from Minnesota I remember.

GP: So you didn't have to cook for yourself; you had somebody cook for you?

JS: Yes.

GP: Only two, or three CPS men was at that. How many CPS men were there at that unit?

JS: I would guess about 12.

GP: I see. So, the major part of the work then, was the CPS men, and Forest Service supervisor, Forest Service—

JS: Right.

GP: —working with you.

JS: Yes. There was a German fellow, who had been in World War One...I can't remember his last name. His first name was Karl, spelt with a *K*.

GP: Of course.

JS: He was a little bit rigid when we first came in. I guess he thought we were a bunch of fellas that were taking the easy way out. After he had been in World War One, I suppose he would naturally have that thought, but as the work went on, he seemed to accept us a little more. I remember—I suppose it was in the spring—when we left, I was surprised, because he came around and shook hands with each man, and he had tears in his eyes, I remember that.

GP: That's interesting isn't it?

JS: He kind of...must have enjoyed us, I guess, a little bit.

GP: Yes, I imagine he did.

JS: Not that we were so wonderful, because we plagued him a little at times, I'm sure.

GP: You had outside breadth, nonetheless, something original and quite different from the usual Forest Service operation. I'm sure that's right. I imagine, on that day, they didn't have a choice of the best men available for the Forest Service itself; that is, the employees of the Forest Service.

JS: No, probably not. Although he was a good man, as far as I could see. I mean, he kept us busy, but he was no slave driver, that's for sure.

GP: Good. 1945 was the big smokejumper year. I made three jumps in '44, and seven and '45, and I'm sure some men who were closer in to Missoula made more than seven. I don't know if I was quite that gung-ho, I probably did about average with seven. How many fire jumps did you make in that last year? Do you remember?

JS: No. I can't divide up how many from one year to the other. I made 19 jumps.

GP: 19 jumps altogether.

JS: Total. I would assume, probably quite a few more in the last year, but I'm not real sure how many.

GP: Well, you had to make seven practice jumps, and you had two refresher jumps. Everybody got two refresher jumps in 1945. You came back to Ninemile, did you, to get those refresher jumps, probably?

JS: Yes, I'm sure I did.

GP: I had the same thing, so that would take care of nine of those jumps. I got one jump which was...I don't know, in between when we weren't very busy. Didn't have many fire jumps. Somewhere along the line, I got an extra jump there, so I had 10 practice, and refresher, and training, and so forth, and then 10 fire jumps. You must have had pretty close to the same number: 9, or 10 fire jumps. Wouldn't you imagine?

JS: I would guess so.

GP: So, you got a lot more that's second year then, 1945, than the first year.

JS: Yes, it was pretty busy that year.

GP: You were jumping out of Ninemile, out of Missoula?

JS: Yes.

GP: Not sent off to Cave Junction, or McCall, or places like that?

JS: No, not during the jumping season.

GP: Do you remember going around, and around, coming in, and spending a night there in Missoula, then going out on another fire?

JS: Right, I remember sometimes you could get back, and get off on the fire, and it wasn't long [before] your name was up for the next one. Although that didn't happen too many times, I mean, it didn't make that many jumps.

GP: That season did you get out as far as Ninemile, for instance, the camp there? I don't imagine you got as far as Savenac Nursery.

JS: No, I wasn't in Savenac until the last thing, and I don't believe I got out to Ninemile much. It was right in town there; you didn't have time to get back up to Ninemile before something happened.

GP: I was out at Savenac, was brought into Ninemile; they brought us in from Ninemile to Missoula, and jumped us. I think, sometimes, I got back as far as Ninemile, but never back to Savenac, not until the very end of the fire season.

JS: That could have been with me, too. That sort of mixes up in my mind now, as to how...I remember Ninemile well, but that was mostly the first year.

GP: Well that was the training place, and we knew that pretty well, I guess. That second year—you've have already talked about one of the experiences helping to carry Oliver Hughes out

after his concussion. Are there any other of the fires of that second year that you remember particularly? Of course, Bell Lake from the first year, that was a big one. Your first fire, almost everybody remembers the first fire jump—

JS: Yes.

GP: —but how about that second year? Were there any that stuck out in your mind?

JS: I was on a fairly big fire, but I can't remember the name of it.

GP: I was on Meadow Creek, which is a pretty big fire.

JS: At least one, or two of those multiple plane-load [fires]. One of them I came down—had a beautiful spot picked out—come right down to it perfectly. I got about four feet off the ground, and must have hit an up-draft, or a thermal, [laughs] and the chute started going down the canyon, with me hanging about four feet off of the ground. Finally let me down on a pile of those big green rocks that you see sticking out of the side of the canyon—

GP: Yes, miserable.

JS: —on my tailbone, and I remember seeing little blinking lights for quite a while after I hit that.

GP: But you had nothing broken?

JS: I believe I crushed a couple of vertebrae. I found out, when I got home, after being released that I had two crushed vertebrae in my back. I limped and groaned around for quite a while not knowing what was wrong, and finally went to a doctor, and they X-rayed.

He said, “You got a couple of crushed vertebrae. Did you know that?”

I said. “No. I know I had something wrong with my back, but I didn't know what it was.”

That's the only thing I know of that could have injured it. I didn't take any [kind] of tumbles at home there. I couldn't prove that's what it was, but [unintelligible]—

GP: It didn't you hurt you enough to keep you off the jumping rotation?

JS: No, it seemed like that it didn't bother me that much until I got home. I kept right on, I fought fire after that too, on that fire. Maybe, it was something else caused it. I wouldn't want to swear to it that it was that, but I think it was.

GP: Probably.

JS: Pretty hard bang on the tailbone.

GP: I bet.

Any other experiences in that second year that you remember particularly?

JS: Nothing too thrilling. I remember one fire, we jumped down—or we were going to jump on—we flew up to Augusta, and the wind was blowing so strong that they didn't dare jump us. We would've blowed clear out of the country, so they landed in a little pasture airfield there, and we walked into the fire. You remember when they took that Trimotor off, they just set it against the wind, and kind of revved up the motors, and within a few [seconds] the wheels were lifting off the ground. Of course, they had a lot of lift in those old—

GP: [unintelligible]

JS: That was a windy one; it was a big fire too. I can't remember what they called that one either, but there was quite a few of us on there. I believe they walked in some people there too, if I'm not mistaken.

GP: Did you have the experience, sometimes, of having gone out, established control of a fire? I mean, having a walking crew come in to do the mop-up?

JS: Yes, I believe so. Although there was very few. It seemed like I was either on a fire where there was enough jumpers so they controlled it, or else it was a small fire, and a couple of us took care of it. I remember one fire—I think that was John Johnson and I jumped on it—we started going around the fire, at the head of the fire, and then we noticed that it had took off up above us, from a spark or something, and we went up there. We always had instructions to take care of anything that went on up and up ahead first, and so we did that. Then finally, after fighting fire for most of the day, we went to get some water down in the creek below. When we got back up, the ranger was there—or Forest Service personnel of some sort—with a horse.

He said, "Why aren't you in here fighting in the head of the fire?"

We said, Well, because it broke out up above here, and we just got it out, and went and got some water.

He said, "Oh, excuse me."

When we got back from that fire, somebody told me that he had called into the headquarters, and said, "We have another fire; send out some of them smokejumpers"—real firefighters. So, I was kind of happy that we hadn't...He was real disappointed when he thought we were just fooling around going and getting water, but he didn't realize the fire took off up ahead.

GP: Once you get a fire under control, one of the things you do want to have—if you can possibly get it—is water. I was on a fire where we had to [go] quite a long way down the canyon before we finally found some water.

JS: Oh boy [unintelligible].

GP: That's important.

JS: It's just about as hard going down as it is up, too.

GP: Oh, you're right, especially if there was heavy underbrush.

JS: Yes.

GP: Well, we've covered several of your experiences as a jumper, 1944 and '45. Is there some other one that you remember particularly that we ought to talk about?

JS: No. I guess I was—

GP: Was there any time then, in your experience with the various fires when you saw a crown fire coming at you and you wondered whether you'd be able to get out of the way, or where you simply rushed off to the side to get out of the way of a crown fire?

JS: The only one I know of that we had to get out of the way, was that one at Bell Lake, and seemed to me pretty much the whole crew—at least within my area of the fire—took off because it was coming pretty fast, and we went over around the end of the lake, as I remembered, or around a point, or something, that we were out of the line of the fire, because it was crowning. There was nothing we could do about that.

GP: No. When you're facing a crown fire, they can't do it all.

JS: They create their own draft.

GP: They certainly do, and they move fast, too.

JS: You bet.

GP: You can't really out-run the crown fires coming out you. There's no way you can out-run at all.

Then, you finish the fire season of 1945. You wound up with 19 jumps all together. Probably 9 or 10 fire jumps along the way, the others training, refresher, etcetera. After the fire season of

1945 when things began to slack down...By the way, you earned some compensation time, didn't you?

JS: Yes.

GP: Working overtime? What'd you do with it?

JS: I believe one time I went home; back to Minnesota on the train. Either that, or I was furloughed [for a] little time, I'm not sure. Mostly I used it to go home, or maybe a few times to go into Missoula for a few days.

GP: My, the trains were very clogged in those days weren't they?

JS: Yes, you usually had to ride on the end of your suitcase.

GP: That's right, and mostly military men [were] going somewhere under orders.

Did the MP's [military personnel?]

JS: No, I was never approached by anybody in the military.

GP: Nor was I.

JS: Usually they we were surrounded with parents with little kids [laughs] which kept you occupied.

GP: I expect so.

Then, after you finished up, and took whatever comp time you had, either going home or something, going into Missoula perhaps, maybe some combination thereof, but then, how'd you wind up in CPS?

JS: Well, I was sent to Savenac Nursery, and I was only there—as I remember—a few days. I believe I received a notice that I was going to be released before I went to Savenac. Then, I went down, and...I think I had to go down and make my own arrangements at the depot to go home, as I remember it. Wasn't too much else to it with that, except a train ride home.

GP: We were on the main line. I guess it must have been the Northern Pacific there in Haugan, Montana—

JS: [unintelligible]

GP: —I remember seeing the trains come through, and it would stop at Haugan for you. That was nothing than a general store!

JS: Yes, I was in Missoula when I took off. I remember I was—

GP: I imagine Forest Service trucks, since you—

JS: I think so; I believe it [was].

GP: And you took the train from Missoula, and made your arrangements for travel back home?

JS: Yes.

GP: Then, after that?

JS: Well, then I sort of picked up the things at home, and started farming. My father had passed away just about a year after I was drafted, so a brother-in-law was operating the farm at home, along with his own. So, I started farming for, I suppose, 20 years after that, or 25. Later on, I did some truck driving. I rented the farm out—it was a smaller farm, as farms go nowadays—and I either had to get bigger, or quit. [laughs]

GP: Or get a better, or different, job.

JS: Yes.

GP: So, truck driving then?

JS: Right, I drove a truck for 14 years. I retired from that last fall. I can't think of anything else in between that was of too much importance.

GP: Essentially, then, the experience here in CPS, and in the smokejumpers, did not really affect you after you left the unit. Is that right?

JS: No, except for next that back injury; it caused me a lot of grief. But I don't blame that on anybody, but I think that's where I injured it, as far as I know.

GP: If you blame anybody, you can blame those rocks.

JS: Right.

GP: [laughs] They're in your way.

JS: Or the down-draft.

GP: That's right.

Looking back now at the smokejumper experience, many years afterwards—we're talking '86, and we're at least in '45, talking 40 years, 41 years afterwards—looking back at it now, you at least felt it pleasant enough that you wanted to come to this reunion.

JS: Right. Yes, I enjoyed the company of the rest of the men. Good bunch of fellows.

GP: So the experience, then, in general, was a pleasant one for you?

JS: Yes, it—

GP: It was something unique in your living experience, wasn't it? Something quite different from anything you've done before, or afterwards?

JS: You bet.

GP: That's right. In one sense then, it is a high point; as a point at least of change, a dramatic change, from anything before or afterwards, and something to look back, laugh, and remember.

What souvenirs do you have at home of the smokejumper experience that you show your children, for example, that you took home and showed your wife? Do you have anything at home like that?

JS: Well, a bunch of pictures, photographs that I took, quite a few. I guess that's about all. I have, maybe, a few of the camp magazines that we put out at that time. That would be about it.

GP: I remember in my trunk upstairs somewhere, there's a yellow streamer. One of those that would have been laying out to tell the plane up above that everything was all right, or, of course, that someone was injured, and we needed some help.

JS: Right.

GP: Remember that streamer we'd lay out? Carry those down?

JS: Yes, I don't remember how many streamers this way and that counted for what. I know you had one signal for it to pop a saw, and another one for climbers, and another one if somebody was injured.

GP: Yes. We've seen quite a few souvenirs here at the reunion. People that have collected a lot of pictures, of course. We've seen color, and black-and-white movies. We have the old smokejumper booklet, and the static line, the camp newspaper. I guess there was a load line also, but I don't remember that nearly as well.

JS: Yes, I can remember that faintly.

GP: Is there anything now that we haven't talked about, that we really should? Is there something you'd like to add to these reminiscences about the days when you were back with CPS 103?

JS: Well, I enjoyed being with the men a lot. I feel close to them, even today, and I don't see them only once every three or five years when you have these reunions, but I certainly enjoyed being around, and we had a lot of fun, a lot of hard work.

GP: Did you come to all of the reunions so far?

JS: Yes, I've been here—

GP: Congratulations, this is my first.

Thank you very much for this contribution to the oral history project. We'll see if other people appreciate as much as I enjoyed talking with you. Thank you.

JS: Thank you.

[End of Interview]