

Interview with Roy Wenger by Roxanne Farwell on 19 September 1984 for the Smokejumpers Oral History Project. OH #133-113.

RF This is Roxanne Farwell with the Smokejumper Oral History Project. I'm interviewing Mr. Roy Wenger. We are at his residence in Missoula. This is September 19th, 1984 and it's about 2:00 PM.

RF OK Mr. Wenger, can you tell me when you were born?

RW I was born on May 20th, 1908.

RF And where were you born?

RW At... near Oreville, Ohio on the farm... on the farm where my parents were living.

RF And can you tell me what you did before you came out here to direct the CPS [Civilian Public Service] camp?

RW Well, I've had several careers. First I was on the farm and then I went away to college (knock at door) and now we got a visitor.

RF OK.

[INTERRUPTION]

RW Well then I... after going to college a couple of years I ran out of money, and in those days we could teach in the elementary schools to earn money to go on. So I did that for a couple of years in a one-room school. I enjoyed it and went back, finished college and taught in the high school. From there, I won't tell you all the details unless you want to know them, but I finally became a professor at Kent State University where I taught for thirty years. I retired in 1978.

RF And which college did you go to.

RW Originally I went to Bluffton College, that's a small college in Ohio... in Northwestern Ohio, and then I went to the University of Akron for a master's degree, and finally I went to Ohio State University where I got my doctor's degree. That was in the field of educational media, and so I had two interests: one was teaching social studies and the other was educational media. And, actually, I became a director of educational media at Kent State University for a number of years.

RF How did you become involved in the CPS program?

RW Well, I was born and raised in a community that talked a lot about how we could settle disputes peacefully without resort to was. In fact, it was a tradition, this was a Mennonite community and most of the people living there in that area were members of the Mennonite Church, and so it wasn't a new idea. We talked

about this a great deal. Actually, as World War II came along in 1940... from 1940 to '42 I was at Ohio State University and, of course, we talked about the problems, of what the country should do at that point, just as graduates always do today, we discuss these problems. And I finally decided that the best thing to do would be to go into Civilian Public Service, the alternative to military action. And so I was finally drafted and chose Civilian Public Service and was assigned to a camp in Colorado. Since I was a little older than the rest, I was ten years older than the average person who was drafted at that time, and also because I had a little more education than some of the others, I was asked to be educational director of the camp. That meant organizing a program of classes and special meetings and the like for the 100 to 150 men in that camp.

RF How long were you at that camp in Colorado?

RW I was... that camp only six months, and then they began to talk about the need for a new camp in Missoula, Montana. You see, in World War II, as you can imagine the beginning of any such crisis, things change very quickly. People didn't know whether this was going to be a short war, a long war, a war that would be involving a lot of people, and so there were changes constantly being made. And these changes came very rapidly, so everybody had to adjust quickly and he did things he never thought he would ever do. Well, at this point, when I was... after I was at this first camp for six months, I heard... I was asked by a supervisor... a director who was a superior of mine that this camp is to be set up and he thought I might be a good person to be the camp director. So he and I came up here all alone, that is, we came together to talk with the Forest Service people up here in Missoula. We visited the area around Seeley Lake, because that was where we were to do our first training, and we decided it would be a good project. And so I accepted the job, we were willing to accept almost anything in those days that provided a new opportunity, a new chance, a new challenge. And my wife and I came up then to help set up the camp there... get started.

RF You knew this would be a smokejumping training center?

RW We knew this would be a smokejumping training center. We didn't know very much about smokejumping or about forestry, although I told you I had this farming background so that helped a great deal. And we entered into it with a lot of hope, really.

RF Was the camp at Seeley Lake sponsored by a church, or anybody in particular?

RW Yes. Would you turn it off a minute?

[INTERRUPTION]

RW The camp was sponsored by the Mennonite Central Committee. There were three Church agencies that sponsored camps, these were

know as the "Peace Churches:" the Quakers, that is, the Society of Friends, about a third of the camps; the Brothern Service Committee, another third; and the Mennonite Central Committee. As the... first, the camps were very much in the nature of Civilian Public Service camps... excuse me, the Civilian Conservation Corps camps, the old CCC camps. So we took over not only the camp, but they took over their projects, soil conservation work and the like. And I think the very first camps were handled very much like CCC camps, although the CCC boys were younger than the Civilian Public Service men who came along later. Well, after the first camps then took over the similar projects to the CCC, they decided that, and the men particularly insisted upon, more demanding and more challenging kinds of projects. So they kept looking for these, and as the war went on, more and more of these more specialized projects were set up, and this was one of them.

Maybe you've read some of the writings of William James. William James was a philosopher/psychologist at the turn of the century, and one of the most famous things he wrote was an essay on "A Moral Equivalent for War." And it was read very widely and published very widely and before World War II, we were reading that, too. Now, William James really said that psychologically what we ought to organize, what we ought to develop as a society, is some kind of an equivalent for war. Now, he said this equivalent should be something that would challenge the bravery of the person, something in which, he said, you ought to... you would be able to risk your life in a good cause, and something that would be physically challenging and something that would be intellectually challenging. And he thought about various ideas that might be developed since back in those days the thing that made war attractive to a lot of young men were these very challenges. It gave them a chance to travel, to get away from home, to discipline themselves, and to see what they really could do. Well, we thought that the smokejumper project fitted the description of William James about as good as anything we'd heard, that is, here is a project that is certainly constructive, it is we could save the country's forests, or part of, we could save some of them from destruction, and it would be... require physical strength, and it would require intelligent approaches to this whole job, not only of parachuting, but fire fighting. So a lot of men were interested in the... when the call went out for volunteers, these camps were all asked to send in names of men who might volunteer for this project. We had a lot of names, and we took this whole list of names and we sorted out from that list the names of sixty people who were invited to come to Missoula. So they were genuinely a unique group.

RF What criteria did you use when you were sorting out those names?

RW Well, I recall... and I helped to do the sorting although the Forest Service, obviously, had a big voice in it. But we chose those people who seemed to be physically fit, that was one quality. Secondly, we looked for people who had some experience that would be appropriate for this job, namely: farming

experience, or construction work, and the like, although some people really came right out of universities and they weren't accustomed to this hard labor. We looked for intelligent people. And, of course, we got a good recommendation for each one from the former camp director. Because of all that, these sixty men that came, I would characterize as just about the smartest group of men I've ever worked with. [laugh]

RF Can you remember any... what your impressions were of the Forest Service when you were just beginning to get involved with them in setting up this camp and how they felt about using these COs [conscientious objectors] as smokejumpers?

RW Yes, I recall some... I have some impressions left about that. In the first place, we looked at each other from a safe distance. We were very formal towards each other. We knew that people had looked upon us with some suspicion. You see, the biggest problem, really, for a person who objects to using war as a means of settling disputes, is that the ordinary person thinks he's opposed to this war, and this war because of it's circumstances. So in this case since Germany and Japan and Italy were the main Axis powers, people wondered if we were pro-German, pro-Italian, pro-Japanese, which really wasn't the case at all. These men were opposed to war as a means of settling disputes, no matter who it would be. So that was one problem. There was also the problem that some people felt that maybe we were merely fearful... afraid to go into combat, for example. That wasn't the case and, of course, we could... we felt that volunteering for smokejumping was one move that might dispell that idea, which was true. But we sort of were very formal with each other to begin with. Now, I notice that looking very briefly at Early Cooley's book [By Trimotor and Trail], that he describes some conversations among the Forest Service men themselves in which they weren't at all sure if they wanted to work with conscientious objectors. We didn't know about that. That was on the other side of the fence. We didn't know, or we might have suspected, that they would be reluctant, but we really didn't know that. On the other hand, among our men, we were uncertain how these supervisors were going to treat us, and so there was some hesitation there to be too friendly right at the beginning. But this really was dispelled in short period of time. And I would say... while there are always a few little personality conflicts, we got along amazingly well. That's my opinion.

RF How did the CPSers get along amongst themselves?

RW Well, I might say that they got along very well. Part of the reason was, as I explained, this was a selected group. The trouble makers weren't involved in this group. By trouble makers, I don't mean to imply that they were in the wrong, but I mean to say that some people had very positive ideas which they maintained, and individualistic ideas, we certainly were not of one mind, and the noncooperators really didn't come to this project. And so most of the men were very cooperative. They were self disciplined.

RF You would need to be, to be a smokejumper, too.

RW Right.

RF OK, what were... what was your... how would you describe your job as a director? What... did you set up projects? Did... what did you do?

RW Yes, well I think my chief responsibilities as camp director, although it was never defined very... very precisely, was first of all to serve as a go-between, between the Forest Service and the Mennonite Central Committee. The Mennonite Central Committee happened to be just in line to take this special project as it was passed along among these three agencies I mentioned. So the Mennonite Central Committee had no special reason to be assigned as administrator of this particular project. So, getting along with the Forest Service, and let me say right here, that we had... that the Forest Service, itself, had assigned remarkably fine people to this smokejumper project. You see, it was a research project. 1944, the second year we were here, was the first that the project was made a regular Forest Service project under a regular budget. Prior to that, it had been a research project. So these people in charge were more broadminded and more receptive of variety of ideas than the average Forest Service man would have been. And we had excellent people to work with. Early Cooley, who was one of the men that we worked with from the beginning, is a fine person to work with and all the men respected him immensely and do to this day. The... his superior was Ralph Hand. Ralph Hand was just a marvelous person in any community and I often talked with him and he dealt with me on a very per... very square basis and I can say that for all the Forest Service men. Perhaps, down the line, there were some people who would occasionally snipe at other people, but you can expect that in any society. So we felt... we never felt very handicapped because of lack of cooperation.

RF How were the smokejumpers provided for? They weren't paid.

RW They weren't paid, and there were differences of opinion among Civilian Public Servicemen on this point. Everybody suspected that the reason we weren't paid was to pressure us into the military, and that's probably true. They're... the head of Selective Service phrased it differently, he said, "If you work without pay, then that proves your sincerity and the community will accept you better, so it's better if you work without pay." Of course, if you are forced to work without pay, we call that slavery, and some of the people felt it was slavery and said so and protested about this slavery. But most of the men didn't. They took a different point of view. The leadership took a different point of view. Their point of view was, "I'm not a slave, I volunteered." And so if you volunteer for constructive service, well, nobody can make a slave out of you. And that was generally the idea, I volunteered to do this without pay. Then, of course, everybody has to eat and have some shelter and some

clothes, so in most of the other camps, not in... not here in the Forest Service smokejumper camp, the idea was to get by as inexpensively as possible. We had dieticians, who were well prepared dieticians, and in those days food didn't cost so much, some of it was contributed, but we ate for less than \$1.00 a day in the regular camps, and we ate well. Nobody should pity the people because of the food. The men had no spending money, unless they happened to have a savings account, which wasn't very often. And there was an allowance of \$3.00 a month in the regular camps, as I recall it. And this \$3.00 enabled you to buy a tube of toothpaste and something of that sort. The rest, you just went without money, or you got it from your parents. But here, in this camp, we started out in somewhat the same style, we were accustomed to that. In fact, my wife was the dietician and so she had... we were proud of being able to put on good food at low cost and to live simply. It was sort of the spirit of the early 1970s when students felt they didn't need to much money, their clothes consisted of a pair of jeans and a shirt and that was enough. Well, we were ahead of that time, we were... back in the 1940s we more or less believed that. But the Forest Service had different ideas, and they came to me at one point and said... they said, "Look, we're all eating together", the Forest Service men and the CPS men, and by this time we were friends and there wasn't very much of a difference among us, and the Forest Service officials said, "The way to keep a man in the forest is to feed him well. To feed him, he's got to have good steaks for this hard labor in the forest. He's got to have all he can eat, and good deserts." And he said, "While you're doing all right with the feeding here, our men don't think it's adequate." And so they brought in their own cooks and we began to have the finest of steaks, everybody. This was during a time, remember, when there was meat rationing, and when was other... sugar was rationed, but we had special supplies because we were out in the forests doing this hard labor. And the Forest Service said that's the only way we can keep men out in the forests. So we fell heir to this tradition, and we, of course, ate the steaks and enjoyed them just like everybody else. So we remember the fine food we had.

Then the second year, they began to say the men aren't dressed adequately. So... and there was particularly one instance of a fellow jumping on a fire and he tore his trousers and he didn't have any money to buy new ones, and the Forest Service Ranger at that local spot bought him a pair of new jeans because he was ashamed to have him ride back in that condition. And then he discovered he couldn't be reimbursed for the jeans he bought. And he became a bit stubborn and they kept working on this and working on this saying, "These men are doing good work, they deserve to have some better clothing." And finally he got paid for his jeans and then there was a system established whereby a man could get two pair of pants, and two shirts, and a pair of shoes, and that's about it for the year. So that helped the clothing outfit some. So we had good food, we had some clothing, and then the spending money was a problem. Well, the Forest Service developed a deal whereby they gave each man \$5.00 a month for buying insurance. There was no insurance on the men.

And the men took the \$5.00, and did they buy insurance? I really don't recall that anyone bought insurance. [laugh] They took this \$5.00 as a monthly pay, and they knew that back in the other camps they only got \$3.00, so there was a lot of fun. And here at one of our recent reunions, on fellow got up and said, "The reason I volunteered for the smokejumpers camp was: first, because I heard the stories of the good food they had out there, and secondly, because of the big pay." [laugh] Because you got \$5.00 instead of \$3.00. So even to this day it's sort of an interesting talking point, but I must say that nobody suffered.

RF Yeah. If the jumpers had a grievance about anything, were you the person that they came to?

RW Yes. I was really, mainly, a trouble shooter. If the men had a... if one of our men had a gripe they would come to me and if a Forest Service had some grievance about a man they would come to me, and we'd get together and talk it over. And I don't recall any problem where we didn't really... weren't able to talk though, if we could just talk it through. These men had a tradition, I'm talking about the Civilian Public Servicemen, of a camp meeting. Now, a camp meeting is a place where you get together and everyone has his say, and we try to arrive at a consensus, rather than at a majority vote. The idea was we'd talk this thing through until we arrived at a consensus that everybody would accept. And it worked remarkably well, particularly with this group. So that was one thing that cleared the air for us. And, I think that generally speaking, I'm sure there's some exceptions, the Forest Service men as we went along more and more respected these Civilian Public Serivcemen and they dealt with them fairly.

RF Yeah. Can you recall any particular incidents where this sort of a process was being used?

RW Well, I recall the first year we had sixty men at Seeley Lake. I don't know if you've seen Camp... the camp there at... Camp Paxson, it's a beautiful camp, a beautiful lodge. It's still used as a Boy Scout, Girl Scout lodge. It was the most beautiful forest area I had ever seen and that the men had ever seen. Down here in Missoula at the University, most of the men were gone. They were drafted or they were working in some government type of work and the girls were left. There weren't very many students at the University, but there was one co-op house of girls who had a young man in charge who was the campus minister, his name was Beatty... Harvey Beatty, and he proposed that he bring his house of girls up to Seeley Lake for a weekend and proposed this to our... one of our fellows. And we had a camp meeting, and we talked this over, and, of course, the fellows were all in favor of this idea, but would it work? And so the Forest Service men had to be approached, and the didn't think it would work. And so we discussed it further and finally the men said well, they would all take their sleeping bags and sleep out in the woods and turn over these cabins, which we had, to the girls. And with some trepidation, that's what we did. Up

they came. And we had a great time that weekend. [laugh] We played volleyball, and we hiked, and we sang, and we had a great time. And it just worked out well, there were no problems at all. After that, I think the Forest Service men up there had more confidence in our ability to handle such a social event. So that's one example that I recall gave me quite a bit of... I thought about it a long, long time. But since the camp group had decided this would be all right, I went along with them. It was very difficult not to do so, and anyway, it seemed good and it was good. Great idea!

RF Yeah. Was there anything that the Forest Service overhead suggested to you that you had to change the way things were being done, things that they thought should change as far as the CPSers went?

RW Not that I recall. In the first place, this work supervision was done very intelligently and they just don't take a person into a responsible position with the smokejumpers unless he's proven himself over the years. So all the people were people of good judgement. So I don't recall anything particularly. Oh, I might mention one thing, as we went along there was... there was a threat of Japanese bombing of this country via balloons, that is they sent balloons over... incendiary balloons to set our forests on fire and most of this information was incomplete, as far as we were concerned. There was censorship during the war. We couldn't quite tell whether this was a real threat or an imagined threat. There were lots of imagined threats as well as real threats. And yet, there was the possibility that we would be called to fight these fires, and so we had a camp meeting as we always did. And we said, "Well, if we let ourselves get involved in this, what's the difference in fighting those fires that the Japanese are setting and serving in the military itself?" There was difference of opinion, the men couldn't agree. About half of them, as I recall, said, "Well, it's fire, we'll put it out." And others said they didn't want to cooperate in this. So we, as I recall it, and remember, my memories are a bit vague on some of these things, it's been forty years, but as I recall it, we told the Forest Service men that we didn't think we'd be united on this business of being sent out to fight these fires should they occur. And they took that, and said, "All right, we'd sort of agree that might be the case." And they found other people and other organizations to get ready to prepare to fight those fires, should it be necessary. As it turned out, there was only one or two... there were only one or two fires, and I believe no Forest Service personnel really got to them, they were put out locally. It wasn't a very successful project for the Japanese.

RF No. So you were aware at least of this potential threat early on?

RW We were aware of that. And I might say that all of our camp meetings brought up the various alternatives, things that might occur, how would we handle ourselves in the process, and

everything was very uncertain.

RF Huh, that's very interesting. I've... in my other interviews we've just touched upon the incendiary bomb threat.

RW Yes.

RF And got a lot of variety of answers on how people reacted to that.

RW We also had a variety of opinions about the work done during the Winter. You see, the smokejumper project was Summer, the Winter, we were assigned to various projects. Some were excellent, some... by excellent I mean they took the skills that the men had developed and used them. Others were a bit on the make-work idea, some of the make-work jobs were slash burning and clearing, clearing trails. It seemed like an endless problem to burn all the slash in the forest to prevent fires, it was cold, and snowy, and wet, and nasty work. Some of these men, and I particularly remember one man, he was an excellent young man, he was from the University of Washington and as he went... he was not one of these farm boy types, he was more of an intellectual. And as he went around burning slash, he felt it was a waste of time and talent. So he wrote a letter saying why he opposed this kind of work, and he posted it on our camp bulletin board. Everybody read it, and then he said he would be leaving camp, going to a hospital to work, and gave the address, anybody who wanted to get in touch with him could do so, everything was open and above board. So he left. He went back to Washington... he stayed in Washington, he worked in a hospital. Selective Service came and put in prison. It was a bad move, in my opinion, but then that's the way it was. And then after he served his term, he was released, I assume, towards the end of the war. Well, since then he's become a fine, contributing citizen as you would expect. And he was asked his opinion about his moves then, and he said, "Well," he said, "it's a very dreary place in prison." And maybe if he had to do it over again he would... might take a different approach. But those were the things we talked about. Some people acted on them some... most people said we'll compromise and do the best we can where we are.

RF Yeah. Can you describe some of the projects that the men were involved in? You were doing the slash burning in winter.

RW A good many of them, well, a certain portion of them, at least, we brought into the Missoula center, which was a center for repairing parachutes, and repairing harnesses, and repairing all the paraphernalia and equipment that was used during the year and they worked here. That was one project. Others got involved in moving barracks from one place to another, that is, the old CCC barracks and setting up new ones for new CPS camps. Others worked at a nursery. That was very important work, a lot of drudgery involved in nursery project work... Forest Service nursery. Mainly, as I recall it, the rest of the people, they cleared trails, dug out culverts for roads, burned slash.

RF Yeah. A lot of physically monotonous and demanding work, huh?

RW Yes.

RF I'm just... I'm just trying to imagine myself in a somewhat similar position at this time and wondering since you met so many of the men and probably had a chance to talk with them and... what, do you think, influenced them, or why, do you suppose, they felt that this type of work was a better thing for them to do rather than be a medic or worked in hospitals or...?

RW Well, in the first place there weren't many choices. You were assigned to your first place. After you were in camp for a while, then there were special places you could go, but when we opened this camp in 1943 in April, there weren't many hospital opportunities open. It was about that time, however, that opportunities to be attendants in the hospitals, mental hospitals particularly, developed and opened up. And some of the men left our project after the first Summer and went into hospital work, partly to get new experiences. Then there were other projects such as the project... an experimental project on... known as the "starvation project" where they try to find out what men's reactions are if they are deprived of food over periods of time, and get measurements on what physical reactions there are, and mental reactions. There were some persons involved in that. And there were a greater variety of projects developed within the Civilian Public Service as time went on. At first it was very narrow, then later there were other kinds of such projects developed.

RF Well, what was your impression of smokejumping?

RW I thought it was a great opportunity within our range of opportunities. I thought it was about the best. I felt very fortunate to be involved in this group. Remember, we... our choices were limited, so I'm talking about within this framework. There were some people here at Missoula, I must say, that were very supportive. We were out at... for most of the time I was with the project for most of the project, we were out at Camp Menard, which is thirty miles west of Missoula. In 1943 and '44, of course, there was not yet an interstate, and we went out old Route 10. And got out to Huson and then turned off for about four or five miles on a gravel road to go up to our camp. There was a minister in town here at the Congregational Church, his name was Guy Barnes, who came out to pay us a visit once and he said, "What do you do on Sundays to organize a religious service?" We said, "Well, we have a religious service, and we do various things. Different ones of us would give a talk." He said, "Well, if we'd want him to, he'd be willing to come out at 8:00... for an 8:00 service on a Sunday morning." And that would give him enough time to drive the thirty miles back to meet with his congregation at 11:00 here in the city. So we said, "Well, we don't have any money to pay you." He said, "That's all

right," he says. And so he did come out and for maybe six to ten meetings... Sundays, he came out and we would preach to us and then come back and preach to his congregation again. We thought that was tremendous, and we did find enough money to give him something like \$5.00 for his gas. Gas was only about \$0.25 a gallon then, I think. So we appreciated his efforts very much. Then one Sunday he came out towards Summer and just before he got there while he was on the way out a fire call came, and so he had not congregation. [laugh] There were only two or three of us left, so we decided after that we would not ask him to come out anymore. By the way, out system there was, and it's one that I remember and I think the men do, too, we said every man has one sermon that he'd like to preach sometime in his life, so we just simply went around went around to every man and said he's responsible for the sermon that Sunday. And we had an amazing number of sermons. I can still remember some of them. There was an architectural student from the University of Washington who talked on arctecture and one's religious beliefs, and it was really fun. And we had all kind of people in our group, you know, and we... I recall we came around to one fellow who was particularly good worker, a little rough and had no education. He was a Jehovah's Witness member and so when his chance came around he was both reluctant to take this responsibility, and then again, he couldn't turn it down. So I remember that he read out of the magazine that his religious group puts out, and so he did all right. He was... he did very well.

RF Hi. Hi.

[Mrs. Wenger and pet come in]

RW This is Keoh. Keoh's just been to school and this is Roxanne. This is my wife, Florence, the dietician.

[END OF SIDE A]

[BEGIN SIDE B]

RF Can you tell me some stories or things that you remember of some of the people you worked with?

RW The Civilian Public Service people?

RF Uh-huh. The smokejumpers, or their overhead, either way.

RW Yes. Well, I recall some people very clearly. For example on man who was a genuine leader in our group was an anthropologist. He had already been to the Aleutian Islands to study the Indian people there... the Eskimo people... the Aleuts--what are they, Indian or Eskimo?

RF Uh, Aleuts?

RW Aleuts.

RF Indians.

RW Prior to his being drafted. And so he was a very active person in our group. He served most of his smokejumping days at the Cave Junction, Oregon center. After he was discharged from the service, he then went on and continued his work in anthropology and sociology and got his doctorate at Harvard. And then he became a long time professor at the University of Wisconsin and now he still... he heads the... the division, who's head I don't exactly recall, but I think it's a combination of biology and anthropology at the University of Connecticut. Bill Loughlan, he's published several books on the Aleuts. He continued and continues today to study the Aleuts. And I have a couple of his books. He writes particularly on the... what happened to the culture of the Eskimos and Aleuts during these years of better and better schools, better and better transportation, television. And, of course, it's in a way sad and in a way inspiring, too, to see how some of these people have... are developing. Sad because it is really the destruction of a great culture, but, I guess, that's the history of humankind, always moving from one kind of culture to another. You can't preserve that same culture over the years. Well anyway, he's a very interesting person. Another person I've kept in rather close contact with is Joe Osborne. Joe Osborne was a professor of mathematics at Bozeman, the University of Montana before he was drafted. I'm not quite sure about this, I'd have to check up on some of these facts I'm trying to tell you. There are some of these remembrances, I may be just a bit wrong. But he became a professor of mathematics at Lehigh University and just retired recently, so he had a long and fine career. There was another fellow, I know him very well and I can't think of his name right at this moment... that's too bad. He has been a professor of mathematics at McAllester University for all these years. He's our reunion chairman for the next session... the next time we meet. We've... we've had people in all lines of work scattered all over the United States. About a fourth of them remained farmers, they were good farmers. They were these Kansas, Nebraska, state of Washington wheat farmers and big-time farmers. They come back to the reunions with stories about the mounds of wheat they raise. Well, any group of people, you know, whether it was in the military or whether it was in Civilian Public Service who went through as sort of stressful experience back in their younger days now like to get together in reunions and talk about those days. So it's partly just this matter of going through a stressful experience together and then coming back and reviewing it. We enjoy doing that. And Early Cooley is one of our favorites, because he has always remained here in Missoula, and he's always shown us a great deal of respect. And every time we have our reunion, we always wait. He's got a certain sentence in his speech that we like, it says, "You know," he said, "over the years... the long years that I was with the smokejumpers." He said, "I don't think there was ever a better group than that 1943-44 CPS group in the smokejumper's camp." So we all applaud and think Earl's a great guy. [laugh]

I told you that part of the job was trouble shooting. I

recall once, and again, I'm giving you my point of view and maybe if you asked some of the other fellows there, they'd give you a wholly different story, remember forty years have passed, but as I remember it, the group out there, there were only ten or twelve of them in that unit that were for the summer... working in that area around Cave Junction in Southern Oregon. They began to be... get some criticism from the community because of their stand on the war. They... Cave Junction is a small town, but as I recall, at that time it had a rather nice dance hall and on Saturday nights, this is where the young people of the community would gather and they'd have an enjoyable time dancing. It was certainly not a wild place, as I recall, a pretty good place. But our fellows went there, and, of course, the local fellows were nearly all gone and the local girls were there. So the local girls met these handsome young guys who were the only available guys around, and so they developed friendships. And there was one fellow in the community who had a physical defect, he was lame, and they called him "Logger." I don't know where he got his nickname, but he began to criticize these fellas because, I think, he felt they were getting the attention of these girls and here he was, kind of a rejected person. He was rejected from the draft, couldn't get around very well, and he began to complain very vociferously about these men. And I was asked to come out because it seemed as if there were some problems. But anyway, I would go around to these various camps and just talk with the fellas just to keep in touch, not always because there was a problem. So the question was: what to do? And we had at our camp meetings, the various alternatives were brought up. Some thought maybe we should just avoid ever going to that dance hall again. Others said, "No! Stay away from this community activity which is fine for us and fine for everybody. We're getting along all right. The problem is Logger." So finally we decided I would go out and see Logger. Well, I went with the Forest Service supervisor of the place and he said, "I don't think I'd go out there." He said, "That's... it would be awfully rough." He said, "You'd hear some things you don't want to hear." Well, I said, "I'll expect that."

Anyway, the two of us went out, the Forest Serviceman and myself, and the result was not unexpected. First there was a very great outpouring of bitterness on his part. And we listened, and it took him half an hour to run down, as I recall it. Finally after this tremendous outpouring of his feelings, well we began to talk and we ended up, I think, in a little calmer mood, certainly, than we had begun. And we said, "We'll come back and see you again and we'll talk this thing out." Well it just happened then that the next week there was a fire and the men were taken up in their plane out there, a small, single engine plane. And the plane wasn't working well so the pilot turned around and hobbled back into the airport... into the little landing strip and he asked the men to get out. And while he worked on the carburetor, and then he would take the plane up and try it out, he said, before they'd actually went to the fire. So he took the plane up to try out. It wasn't fixed, he crashed and he was killed. Well, that was sad and it was sort of a narrow escape for a larger group. And so the fire was still

threatening and so they called a nearby Marine camp to bring in a DC-3, or some equivalent of it. And so it came in on an emergency basis, took the men up, and dropped them on the fire, and they were successful in putting out the fire. Well all this had a tremendous spread in the local newspapers: first, the narrow escape of these men, the death of the pilot, and then the success of the second effort of putting out the fire. And the newspaper more or less ended, "We're thankful that we got these Forest Service men to put out the fires." And this so pleased the community to know that they were able to do this, that all the criticism was pretty much forgotten and we never heard anything about Logger after that. And I think everybody danced happily on Saturday night. [laugh] That's just one thing I recall. It was pretty important at the time.

RF Yeah, really. I interviewed one person from Cave Junction, he jumped in '48 and '49, and he mentioned that the community there was some discussion of how...

RW Do you remember the man's name?

RF Clemenson.

RW Ah, I see. No, I... what did he say about the community?

RF Uh, that when he had arrived in Cave Junction that he heard about some of the hostilities that started out in '43 and '44.

RW Well, it's true. I guess as you talk about these things, there's some question about what genuine, destructive hostility really is. One expects a level of hostility and some people are affected more by it, perhaps, than others. If it's completely unexpected, then it shocks people a great deal, if you more or less expect a little bit of it and work with it, why usually you can live along with it.

RF So you were the director of the camp here, but you also were involved with the smokejumper projects elsewhere?

RW Well, you see our system was that here at Nine Mile everyone got the training. For example, the first year when we had only sixty people, they got the training and then they went out into about six site camps in groups of six to twelve. And then during the fire season I went around to these camps, everything was new to us, and the Mennonite Central Committee said, "Keep in touch." So as the plane... the Forest Service plane would fly around to deliver supplies, I would sit next to a quarter of beef and a case of tomatoes, all the rest of the things in there, and fly into these camps in and out. Stay two or three days, move onto the next one. Both my wife and I did that. That's how we learned to love Montana, we've never been able to get away from Montana since. [laugh]

RF Great way to see the country, yeah. [laugh] And the way the camps were run was pretty similar in all of them, or was there

anything really different about the way... you talked about reaching a consensus at Nine Mile, was that a procedure that you used in all the different camps?

RW Yes. That was the procedure we used in each camp. It depended somewhat upon the personality of the Forest Service supervisor. Some Forest Service supervisors felt more comfortable keeping a very close reign on things, others let the men decide things for themselves. But again, here's where the characteristics of the men themselves show up. They were just a remarkable group in that all these various groups seemed to manage themselves without any special attention. And when we talk about community... some community criticism, which there was, I'm sure, maybe more than I knew about, there was also a great deal of community acceptance. For example, one of our men was asked to come in here to the Methodist Church here in Missoula and preach a sermon on Easter Sunday morning. He later became a head of the Y.M.C.A. [Young Men's Christian Association] organization at the University of Washington. His wife was from here, he found his wife here... met his wife here. There were other instances of that kind where people were really asked to take responsible positions and the community accepted them very well.

RW At the end of the war, when the decision was made, I guess in Region-1, to let all the CPS smokejumpers go and not rehire or allow them to be hired, I guess, because they were volunteers. Do you remember anyone who had wished to keep on jumping and was hoping they would be able to keep on doing it?

RW Yes, there were a number that would have liked to have remained, but at that point... again, there were many uncertainties because now the demobilization of men began, and, you know, there were 12,000,000 men that were... that were drafted in World War II, and they all came back, they wanted jobs and so it was decided by the local Forest Service group here that they better just tell the CPS men, "Thank you, we're finished now." And then start all over with a new crew, so they didn't keep any CPS men. I think there were a couple men that moved to another part of the Forest Service... two or three, and I think you mentioned them when you came, who were with the Forest Service until they retired. Maybe some still are, I'm not quite sure. A couple men in Alaska who were with the Forest Service there and with smokejumping. However, the decision here was, "Let's make a clean sweep so that we don't have to go through this job of saying we'll keep two or three favored people, and then let the rest go."

RF Uh-uh. As a group they would have been the most experienced smokejumpers around.

RW Yes. They would have. That's right.

RF [laugh] They probably would have almost take them all.

RW But they didn't have had any job security. And the veterans had a little promise of job opportunity.

RF So then the other regions... this was sort of a region by region decisions, some of the others decided they would keep some of the CPS?

RW Yes. By the way, I made a little study myself a couple years ago, I'd be glad to send you a copy, of... after thirty five years, did the men think they were discriminated on... in anyway after they left the camp here. Did they have difficult time getting jobs? Were they discriminated against while they were on the job later? And the general opinion was, "No", really. It was a difficult question to answer, some thought that the very fact that three years were taken out of their lives at that time meant that they were setback, but so was everyone who went into the service. So there was an amazing, small amount of discrimination reported. In my own case, I know I started out looking for a job, I just gotten my doctorate in 1945. In fact, it was while I was in CPS, I went back and took my final examination on my dissertation. And then I didn't know what to expect as far as a job was concerned, but I found out... and, of course it was... the market was great at that time for college professors, there were openings everywhere. Students were flocking back and they needed staff members. So I was offered two... three excellent jobs and in each case I explained what I had been doing and they said, "That's all right, if it's all right with you." And so I felt that I was never discriminated against in any way. Mostly, of course, people say, "Can you do the job" whatever job it is. And if you can do it as well as anybody else, why then they will employ you. There maybe a few exceptions.

RF You have any other impressions or things you want to mention right now about the experience?

RW Well, I've often wondered if the Missoula community might have been a very fortunate community to be able to work in under those circumstances. In a way, the Missoula community is a very conservative community. I suppose you see as many National Rifle Association signs around here as you do anywhere, and there're people of that point of view. On the other hand, there are a lot of very tolerant people around Missoula. There's the University, and Universities are always on the more tolerant side, and, I think, that generally there's a little of that pioneer spirit out here that says, "Well, no matter what the fellow believes, if he can do his job, why it's all right with us." So I think Missoula was a good place to happen to be.

RF When you look back on your years as the director of the camp here, what are the feelings that you have?

RW Well, in the first place, everyone has feelings of nostalgia for the good-old-days and in a sense, these were the good-old days, even though some people might paint a much less rosy

picture than that. But I have good feelings toward the people here, toward the men who were here, toward the Forest Service, and toward the community. My wife taught the last year we were here in the University nursery school, and she appreciated that opportunity to learn to know the University and the University nursery school. At that time, there was a man by the name of [W. A.] Anderson who was Dean of Education, a very forward looking man. Earnest Melby was the president. Later on I came across these men in numerous occasions in educational meetings and we exchanged ideas on our experiences out here. And they had respect for the smokejumper's project. So, I guess, I feel it was a very fortunate experience, maybe that's one reason why I'm... my daughter picked up that idea. She likes this area of the country, probably because we brought her out here so much. And now we're here again.

RF Is there anything else you would like to add right now?

RW I think that's about it, and I'm going to be very interested in reading what you summarize on all this.

RF OK.

RW It's going to be a hard job, but I can think of nothing more right at the moment.

RF OK. Well, thank you very much.

RW You're welcome.

[END OF INTERVIEW]