

**Oral History Number: 163-019**

**Interviewees: Joseph Coffin, Audine Coffin**

**Interviewer: Rosa Stone**

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**Project: Civilian Public Service Smokejumpers Oral History Project**

Rosa Stone: This is an historical interview. I'm Rosa Stone, of—

Joseph Coffin: Joe Coffin

Audine Coffin: Audine Coffin

RS: And I think you come from the traditional Quaker peach church.

JC: Yes. I am [from] a long line of Quakers. Audine and I met at Whittier College, were married there before she graduated, finished college together. I got my secondary and she got her elementary teaching credential, and immediately thereafter I went into CPS 37.

RS: Okay. You had no trouble getting the 4-E classification, coming from that background.

JC: No, no problem at all.

RS: And where were you assigned then?

JC: I was sent immediately to Coleville, California, CPS 37. It had just opened. Being filled with men from Merom, Indiana, Potasaco (?)—

AC: Coshocton.

JC: Coshocton. They had sent out a draft, or asked for volunteers to come out west and fight forest fires. They had to draft some to get enough to build the crew. When they got there, of course, there were no forest fires, no forests, and the camp was then, when I got there, within the first month, the camp was at a very, very low state of morale. I was assigned to be a truck mechanic, because of previous automotive experience that I had, and the camp did quite a bit of fighting of brush fires, but not forest fires. Of course, Coleville, California, is east of the Walker River, beautiful country to the west but barren to the east, where the camp was located. The men were very, very bitter about their recruiting problems. So it was quite an introduction.

RS: Did you want a way out, then, and applied for smokejumpers?

JC: No. I did a lot of soul-searching at that time, and there were some others in the camp doing the same, and we were getting to the point, because our work project was really a waste of

energy, we were building a sheep trail, as though sheep needed a trail, and the men were just very bitter about the fact that we were not doing work of importance. So I was expecting to walk out of camp, to leave, and Dr. Conway, from Eastern State Hospital, in Medical Lake, Washington, came to the camp to recruit people for his mental hospital. That was to be CPS 75.

AC: I think that was one of the first mental hospital units. It's an early one.

JC: An early one. And I was chosen, along with 25 others, to go to that unit. Audine and I decided, both of us, to go. As a result of that, I did not leave camp. I stayed and went on furlough. We had a little Model A Ford touring car, and we loaded that up with everything that we owned, and I had been chosen to be camp director. And we drove to Spokane, and then out to Medical Lake, Washington, arriving on the 24<sup>th</sup> of December.

RS: What year was this?

JC: This was in 1942. I had been drafted in July of '42, and I went to Medical Lake in December of '42. So we arrived on December 24<sup>th</sup> and went to work on the wards, each of us, December 25—

RS: You also worked in the hospital, Audine?

AC: I worked there. I was the only woman in the unit, so—

JC: Of course, she wasn't in the unit, she went as my wife. But Conway had hired her, at my request, knowing that she was, of course, trained as a teacher, and that she would come, and she had a job when she arrived. And they gave us a room to share on the third floor of the epileptic ward, ward 17, and we moved in and lived in that one room for a substantial period of the time we were there.

AC: I got room and board and 25 dollars a month.

RS: And your pay was?

JC: Room and board, two dollars a month, and uniform. It was a good hospital. Conway had remodeled and built new buildings, so that it was as up to date as any hospital in the country. That is, large portions of it. There were still some old 1800s, 1888 buildings, and stuff like that. But he would not allow the old buildings to become warehouses, junk rooms, for the patients. He had high ideals. And I felt from the beginning, and we have felt ever since, that this was an exceptionally well-run hospital. Although the manpower—they were in desperate shape because everybody had left to go to the shipyards in Seattle.

AC: The fact that they got a CPS unit in there was a lifesaver, because they worked 12-hour days. And not only that, but they worked well. So that CPS men could cover what three or four

other attendants would do, and were willing to do it. There was some violence, but I don't think it was as much as we've heard from other places. And, of course, the CPS men did not tolerate that. There was a lot of social ostracization there. Eventually we could not be served in the town of Medical Lake, we were asked not to come to the church. If we were walking along the road we had to be very careful: there were people who would try to run us down. We became a very close-knit group. We grew spiritually immensely. The thing that we found, however, was that if you did not have a religious base for your convictions, you probably could not stick it out. I think we had, what, two or three people who—

JC: Political objectors.

AC: Who just could not last it.

RS: Could not stay.

AC: The ostracization, the social pressure, the economic pressures were just too great. You really had to have a religious conviction to stay in that situation.

RS: How long did you stay at this hospital?

JC: Until we came to Missoula in 1945.

RS: Oh, you were there quite a while.

AC: We stayed in the unit of 25 with, what, about five new people came in.

JC: We had about five exchanges.

AC: And then, then the group was going to grow, with a larger group coming in. At this time, now we had three of us, four wives. And we held key positions at the hospital so they could not operate, really, without us. I was head of the psychiatric division, social services. Another woman was head of missions, another was head of accounting. So we really were in key positions.

RS: And when you left there and came to Missoula, there was a job for you, but—

AC: Not for me.

RS: You had to find your own.

AC: When the new wives came in, Dr. Conway became frightened. Because we were not buying war bonds. And so he demanded that the four of us buy war bonds. We said we would not, and so he wired the wives that were coming in, and asked if they would take our jobs. And they did.

That made it possible to fire us. So three of us then, one of them bought war bonds rather than to leave her husband. Three of us went into town, and then that was when I began working with Gordon Hirabayashi. He's the famous Gordon Hirabayashi, who has just won a Supreme Court decision that says that evacuation of the Japanese was illegal, and has laid the basis for the reparations. So Gordon and I worked and developed an inter-racial house, which served as the stopoff point for the Japanese because that was as far as they could come out of camp. So from there, then, they would find housing. The young people would come out first, the Nisei. Who could speak English and were not as frightened. They would come out and find housing and find jobs. Then they would bring the Isei out, which were the parents. Many of whom did not speak good English. They would come and then come. So we had this group coming through. Plus we had a steady group, who stayed there, at this house. That's how we got to smokejumpers. Because the smokejumpers on furlough would come, and we had a big basement where we had—

JC: Beds.

AC: Beds, bunkbeds.

JC: And food.

AC: And the guys would come over—and social life, because we had something happening all the time—and they would come over there, then, on furlough. And so it was a group who came over there. George Case, and—

JC: Carlson [Addison Carlson].

AC: Yeah, Carlson came over there in one year, and Joe at that time, had been on night shifts for quite a while. Oh, I should say that when the big group came in, and some wives took the jobs of some and made it possible for Conway to fire some of us, it split the group. Because that was a morale breaker. And so the group then became less close and so forth, and then a big group, who felt for wives to have taken other wives' jobs, even if they didn't have the same principles, was wrong, and that group then began coming into Spokane. So that group then stayed and worked at the...well, did a lot of work. It was just a different life. We then were not as close to the group that were out at Medical Lake. Joe was ready to walk out again. [laughs] That was almost a yearly thing.

RS: And you got the smokejumpers.

JC: Because of these men there on furlough. And—

AC: Who said Joe ought to try smokejumping before he walked out.

JC: We'd been there a long time by this time. We had our first son, was born, in December, then, of '44. I made application. Anxious as to whether or not I could handle it, because by this time I'd been working night shift for a year or so, and was in poor physical condition, I felt. So that when the transfer came through, I was very excited but very anxiety-ridden. We didn't get here immediately, we took a furlough. Went back home and had a couple of weeks at home and then came up on the train to Missoula and arrived, what, April—

AC: End of April. April 25, I think.

JC: Yeah, April 25.

RS: And where did you train, then, when you got there?

JC: I trained at Ninemile, went right into training. Audine found, well, lived with the Cases for a while and then got the apartment that they were vacating and got a job in the YWCA.

AC: Not right at first.

JC: Oh.

AC: Right at first...I had my teaching credential, but there was no place to teach here, and I was the only one with a child, and so I really walked the streets looking for a job. Finally I decided that I would take housecleaning. So I scrubbed floors and did housecleaning. In the process of doing that, I also became acquainted with a lady who was crippled and so I took care of her for a while, did the housework there, because I could have Jerry with me. Then she became so bad they needed to hospitalize her, and about the same time as that happened, and I was feeling frantic as to what we were going to do, the Y...I don't know whether I had applied there, I don't really remember that, but at any rate they called me and wanted to know if I would come up and work as assistant director, with the idea of taking over. So I did that, and then I walked the 15 blocks to work, pushing the baby carriage, and I could have Jerry there until he got to where he was really walking well. Then I, about that time, I began to get paid a little better and my mother also gave some money so that I could get a babysitter. Then I was able to get a babysitter. I don't remember how much I made. It was not...We could get by.

RS: Your pay as a smokejumper was a little more than it was in the hospital?

JC: I think we got five—

AC: Fifteen dollars, I think.

JC: Did we get 15 dollars a month?

AC: I don't remember.

JC: I don't recall.

RS: But you had to buy your own boots, and—

JC: Yeah.

AC: No, I think the boots were furnished.

JC: I think they furnished the boots. The first thing they did was send me down to get a pair of boots.

RS: They assigned them.

JC: I recall that the first day that I got here. And a couple of pairs of jeans, because I didn't have any, and then I went to Ninemile.

RS: Now did you work on projects, in between jumps and things?

JC: No. All I did was train. I have a very limited recollection of my training period because I was so deeply anxious as to whether I could qualify or not. I never was able, for instance, to climb the rope. I couldn't go two hands up. And that was supposed to be essential, and I was panic-stricken about that. Negotiated with the crew chief, that if I could figure out and train myself to be able to get out of that harness, which was the purpose of the rope climbing, if I could do that as well as anybody else, could I pass even though I couldn't climb the rope? And he said, yes, that would be acceptable. So I developed a trick, a technique for swinging my leg up a certain way and unhooking, and I ended up taking a second and a half off the record time. He said, "Fine, you've made it and you can go," and that was the biggest thing off my mind. When we got ready for the first jump, why they called Audine on the telephone and asked if she wanted to come out and watch that first jump.

RS: Really?

AC: They said we're leaving in a half hour, can you get someone to take care of the baby? In those days you had cook the formula, so I cooked the formula and got him ready and found a nursery, I have no idea how I knew that there was one at this church, and dashed and they came by and picked me up and we dashed over and dropped Jerry off—and I never even told them what his name was. All day long they just called him baby, new baby...And rode the trimotor out to watch him jump.

JC: That was an exciting time for both of us.

RS: What was your first jump like?

JC: Well, of course, I'd never been up in a plane before.

AC: [laughs]

JC: I was the last man in, first man out, and I rode the step on the takeoff, and that was frightening. The ground was, what, 18 inches below my foot. And I watched that go. Our crew chief—and I can't to this minute remember his name—but he had been absolutely devoted to the idea that you needed to have a lot of practice in that exit from the door. So he had put us through that tower jumping out of the door probably five times as much as anybody else. Then I did more. I went up after supper, I would go out and practice. So I felt real confident about that, was able to enjoy getting ready for that first jump. I was of course excited, but they had the microphone and the speaker to talk us down. She was standing with the man that was doing that. I forget who was calling out on that time. We were about 25 feet from the spot, and I just came right down and I nailed them, they had to grab the microphone and run because I came right in on the spot. I felt real good about that. I had a very successful—

RS: You were the first one down.

JC: First one down and I hit the spot right on the button. Rolled perfectly right in front of the leader and he was so proud of his training. So that was a real exciting time.

RS: You had learned how to guide the chute so that you could get in right in where you wanted to go.

AC: Tell them about how he made you change rocks, and why you felt so confident.

JC: Oh. The reason I felt the confidence, I recognize this now as I've talked to the fellows here, is that this leader had been dedicated to the idea that you needed to be aware of what you were doing in that first few minutes. Rather than just jumping out with your eyes closed, you had to know. So he would put us in...he gave us a rock in one hand and said, "Okay now. Take that rock and pass it behind your back and put it in your other hand and show it to me, as you go down, coming out of the tower jump practice." And it sounds quite simple but we found ourselves throwing rocks all over Montana while we were trying to get control enough to pay attention during that second and a half you're just out of the opening and haven't opened yet. He wouldn't let us go until we could do that particular item.

RS: So you had mastered that.

JC: I felt that I knew what I was doing during that original second-and-a-half of going out the door. I never had a minute's trouble with an opening of the chute, no trouble with landings.

RS: No injuries of any kind.

JC: No injuries. One time I came down on a large rock, and I had numb feet for about an hour, but—

AC: I think he always felt aware of where he was, what was going on.

JC: Then I think it was George Case had given me what I considered to be key advice, and that was, he said, “As you’re coming down, you’re preparing to roll, of course. Don’t wait until you are down. As soon as you can detect the leaves on the grass and the bushes, begin your roll because you’re there. You haven’t time to wait and then make a decision.” So that meant that I was getting a fraction of a second early, and I had good rolls and never had a minute’s trouble except that one time with the rock.

Then one time I hung up in a snag, but came down quite gently, so I didn’t have to do much more than let myself down, maybe ten feet. But then I was able to pull the snag over and didn’t have to go up after my chute. I had real good jump experience from that point of view.

RS: And you never had to carry someone out, who was wounded or—

JC: No.

AC: Okay, well now that was...He did get called, after fire season started, he did get called when...Who’s the one?

JC: The one we’ve been talking about here, who—

AC: Got carried out, had a broken leg and was quite seriously injured.

JC: He’s here tonight. Can’t think—

AC: Has a family here. Has grandchildren here, just right over here.

RS: Is it Coffman?

JC: No.

RS: No, it’s not Coffman.

AC: Well. Okay, I can get his name. Anyway, he was injured, and Joe had come out of a medical unit and knew how to give shots, and had been trained to give it. Medical Lake—

JC: It was a training hospital.

AC: It was a training hospital, and they took the nurses training. So he had the training. And we had an apartment, and they agreed, which was really nice, that Joe could stay at the apartment when he wasn't on a fire if we had a telephone so they could reach him. So we got a telephone. And they called and Joe was out on a fire, and they called and said, "Audine, do you know when Joe's going to be in?" They always called and asked me and I never knew.

But I said no, I don't.

Said, "As soon as he gets in, have him call"—because quite often they would just drop him off on the way over to the college—"and have him call because we have a serious injury, and we need him to drop to give the shot."

Well, Joe was out on a fire that had just been a blistering fire, and burned their boots. And when he got in, which was a matter of two or three hours, his boots were burned and he couldn't jump. They called frantically, it was on a Sunday or Saturday, Saturday. Late Saturday. Could not get a shoe man that could repair those boots. And they kept frantically calling. In the meantime, they finally had located an army doctor, and they thought the army doctor was going to drop to where he was injured. The truth of the matter was, the army doctor dropped quite a ways down the trail. So they really carried him without any medication for quite a ways and then they got to the army doctor.

But Joe said, "I'll jump the way I am," and they said they wouldn't allow that.

They said, "We don't need another injured man." So as it turned out, they did carry him down to where the army doctor was. But, when you read the newspaper articles, which I do have here, it was quite a ways before—but that's the only time they did. But he had spent some time at Savenac because he was in the May group of training.

JC: We trained in May, and then I had been, from there, while they trained the June group, I went out to Savenac nursery with the other fellows and we transplanted trees until the first fire season call.

AC: That was where they organized the—

JC: And that's the only time that I was ever on any kind of—

RS: Other project.

JC: Of project.

AC: That's where they organized the planning crew and the Savenac stomp (?) and...

JC: Reminded us of a name, but I can't think of it now. The Savenac Marauders, or something of that nature, that we did because of the type of work we were doing. We decided we were going to break all the records that they'd ever had in setting these new trees out. And so we developed a style for doing it, and we developed a rhythm and we really had a lot of fun. And we competed against each other. We would set up teams of ourselves to see how fast could we transplant these young seedlings. And that, to me, was really quite a pleasant experience. I never had the long, grueling hours of—

RS: Dull.

JC: Dull fence building, or whatever, that other fellows feel has been their lot. I feel fortunate in that, although I probably have had my dose of ill treatment that others have had.

AC: Tell them about the time the Mennonites—

RS: Just a second. Was that a one, two, three hup?

JC: Yeah.

AC: Yeah. [laughs]

RS: That you had going on. One, two three, hup.

JC: They had a trencher, a gasoline-powered trencher that opened up a trench, and then we had six-foot boards with dividers on them, then you laid down the seedling, with the roots pointing all in one direction, all exactly the same distance apart, then plant another board against it. It was these old spring door clamps, would clamp it together. You'd take that out and lay it in the trench that had been made. Then, you came along with a hoe and you filled in the trench and stamped on it. You filled in the trench and stamped on it. So it took one, two, three, stamp, one, two, three, stamp, one, two, three, stamp to get everything to go, and then the trees were then firmly located in the soil, and you opened up these spring clamps and took the boards off, and the trees were four inches apart down the long ditch. And we did acre after acre of these things, up and down. And we got to where we were running from the layout board down to the trench and filling it, and running back and getting another one, and going just as fast as we could go. Taking our turns putting the trees on the boards and doing everything. So that it just, to me, it was a lot of fun.

RS: It would have been grueling without this—

JC: It could have been grueling without this kind of thing, and it could have been grueling to do it for eight months, instead of three.

[break in recording]

RS: We're going to continue the interview after an interlude, and here we are. Joe and Audine Coffin. Tell us about the Mennonite that came in to Savenac.

JC: As the story goes, one of the Mennonite officials, I don't know how they decide who's official, et cetera, was coming to visit the camp. Sort of an inspection tour, as we gather. And the fact of the matter was that many of the young Mennonite boys had girly pictures in their bunkhouse, and the word went out that the hierarchy was coming, and a runner was sent: go through all of the rooms and be sure that the pictures were brought down so that we could pass muster and not be disbanded and sent to our homes. The other story is that on one of our fires, I forget which one it was, I have a feeling that it was a relatively mid-sized fire, that we weren't having much success. We'd lost a couple of fire lines, and finally, one of the men suggested that the only way we were going to be able to cure this problem was to take one of the young Mennonites out and sacrifice him to the fire gods. We had no volunteers. Nobody picked up the hatchet for that purpose. We went back to the fire line and finally subdued it by ourselves, but that was a realistic approach, we thought.

Actually, the fire that I remember the most fondly was one in which we threw out all of the men over what looked like a lovely green hillside that we could land on and march easily up to the fire, which was just over the crest. And as the men went out, on the first pass, they seemed to land just fine. We turned around and came back for a second pass, and there wasn't a single chute to be seen. Everybody had disappeared. We didn't know what to make of that. I was in the second pass and went out, came down to a soft, nice landing, only what happened is that I went down through the leafy branches of a whole field of alder trees that bounced lightly in the impact, and I found myself standing on the ground, looking up and you couldn't see the sky. The alder trees had completely covered in, and our parachutes had come down with us, because the branches weren't strong enough to hold them up. Here we were, all of the crew in these trees, unable to see each other, because it was so thick. We spent nearly three hours getting together to get our chutes out and find each other and get ready to go climb up a few hundred feet over the crest and go to work on the fire. But we had all just disappeared into this greenery that constituted a lovely hillside from the air. But we were walking around under a canopy of green and couldn't see up.

RS: And no one knew this.

JC: Nobody previously knew this. We were all acting as individuals, searching for each other, trying to get together to make a fire crew. When we'd done a couple of days work, we were going to have some time to rest, we dug ledges for sleeping bags and settled down for a nice sleep. The next morning, all the boys who had rawhide boot laces woke up to find their shoes were empty because the chipmunks had come in and gnawed up all their boot laces. So these fellows were tying their boots together with streamers and pieces of string and rope, trying to get back on the job. That was one in which we had, I think, probably a crew of eight. We got the

fire under control rather rapidly, but we had more of problems non-fire than we had fire problems.

RS: You finally got to your fire and took care of it.

JC: Yes we did, and we got it out.

RS: You bet.

AC: You need to tell about the most scary event you had.

JC: Oh. Unfortunately I'm not able to identify fires by name, as many of the men are. I must have just not paid attention to what I was going out to. But on one of the fires, it was a substantial one, we had a large crew that set up a fire camp. On about the third day I was out with, I think six other men, and we were up a small valley. The fire that we were working on, the edge of it, it looked like it was under control. Suddenly we turned around and started, we thought, to go back and join the other fire line men and we recognized that the fire was running towards us, rather than being subdued. We were in a small glade, a little stream running through. The fire began to get hotter and hotter, bushes were exploding into flame around us. We jumped onto a small island and thought, well, we can stand it here, but the little bushes right on that island where we were standing were just popping into flame, and we were just getting extremely hot, didn't know what was going to happen. Finally the crew chief says, "In the water everybody," and there wasn't much water. It was a kind of a small, stagnant stream. There was a little cliff. Not cliff, it was three feet high, little bank of the island we were on. To the edge of that was a small pool of water with a little coming in and a little coming out. We all climbed into that, submerged ourselves as well as we could, and then watched the fire go across, over us all the way up the valley. We felt extremely fortunate that we had a place to save ourselves.

RS: Did you lose your chutes and all your equipment?

JC: No, the chutes and equipment were on another ridge. This is the last mopping up. The last fellow who finally came into the water was a young fellow who had a back pump. And as these bushes were exploding into flames, in the midst of hundreds of acres of fire, he was out pushing that back pump and putting each of these little fires out. He was bound and determined to go down to the last minute. And we finally said, hey, get out of there and get in this water. We saw there was nothing else we could do there so we started hiking down to get back to fire camp. As we came into camp, I now recognize that we looked pretty bad. We had been completely submerged, we were dusty and dirty, muddy—

AC: Ashy.

JC: Ashy, ashen, as well. And as we walked into camp, the expression on the people who saw us was that of recovered ghosts, because they had almost...they thought we were gone, that they had lost us. Because they had a report that we were working up that draw, and then they saw the fire go up the draw. And they thought, no way in which we could get out but we came out and they were very, very happy, as we were, to make it back to camp. They felt very fortunate that we had made it and so did it. I guess that was perhaps the most frightening experience. It was kind of a bonding experience. We had a feeling that we had been saved from a real destructive situation.

RS: Gives you a little empathy with the Wag Dodge situation [the Mann Gulch fire of 1949 that killed 12 smokejumpers].

JC: Yes, yes.

AC: It really did.

JC: Yeah. You have a tendency [to think] what can I do, how can I outrun this? And I can feel for these guys in the Mann Gulch fire, trying to run uphill from a fire. At the same time knowing that there's nowhere to go. It must have been extremely frightening.

RS: Yes.

JC: What else? I could come home and recount to Audine what happened to me, and she recalls better than I, because in fact my feeling for the whole era is just one of participation and excitement and satisfaction and I wasn't really tabulating and recording the things as items that I should individually remember. The total experience was a great one.

RS: You were too busy living.

AC: You had eight fire jumps. I don't think you ever had more than a one-night layover once the jumping started. He was extremely busy.

JC: The other fellows talk about having gone to work projects of this kind and that kind in between fires, and things like that. I didn't recognize, know even, that's what was happening. Because as I've said earlier, I was tied to Audine, my desire to get back to the apartment, but in the meantime I was being called out nearly as fast as I was coming in, and I just assumed that's the way fire season was. I didn't know until late that we were having a big season, this was unusual, and that we were actually fighting a lot more fires than previously. As the chart that I've put on that little placard we've made showed, we had more than twice as many fire jumps and fires as the previous five-year total. So we were busy and I just assumed, because they didn't give us that information until late September, I just assumed that's the way fire season was.

AC: You might want to tell about your last jump.

JC: I think that was with Hubey [Herbert] Taylor again. Hubey and I were great friends. We had been at West Town together and hadn't been great friends there, but we had been well acquainted and we'd developed a lot of camaraderie over this time, having been at Savenac together too. So the two of us went out, this is the one Audine mentioned when—or did you mention—about the war being over?

AC: I didn't tell.

JC: Oh. You did?

AC: I didn't.

JC: Oka. My last fire, the news came over the radio that the Japanese had not fully agreed to surrender, but it was expected, the peace talks were starting. I had to go out anyway. Audine put the window up and called to me, said, "Hey, come back for a minute, listen to this radio story." So I turned around after that and left, not knowing whether the war was over or would be. We went out on the fire, I think we went out on the TravelAir, just the two of us. Wasn't a big one, I think one, two, three trees, something like that. We had an easy jump, and we thought, well, we don't want to really go back and do a lot more firefighting, let's see what we can do with this one. And we sat around, we kept the fire going, fed it a little bit, and got a fire line around it so it was safe and secure, with a fire line, and then we didn't push it for a day. We sat around and chewed the fat, enjoyed it. We knew we had to leave, had to get it out, no smokes, and so we extinguished it absolutely and went to bed. The next morning we got up, it was bitter cold, begun to snow. We had nothing but t-shirts on, and it had begun to snow. And we wanted a warm breakfast and there wasn't a spark to be found. We didn't have a match. We were sitting there freezing, trying to mix up some sort of a concoction that would get us warm, no coffee no nothing. And we decided to get out as fast as we could. We packed up everything and started hiking down to...we found a pack trail. Left our stuff with streamers, and thought, well, we'll go on down, see if we can't get a ride in. We did, in another, I don't know how many miles—three, five miles—we came to a road and started down that. Along came a man in a truck and we hitched a ride. First thing we asked him, "Well, is the war over?"

He looked at us and said, "What war?" I'm convinced he was pulling our leg, but it was a distinct shock. Because we still didn't...he didn't have any information. Obviously, he knew there was a war, but he didn't know, he apparently didn't know that it was over.

AC: Well I think it had drug on, still was not over.

JC: I think it was in that six-day, or seven-day period of negotiations. And then finally, that actually then was our last jump. We went in the heat of the day, nothing but t-shirts, and came home freezing in snow.

RS: But if you had put the fire out immediately and gotten out, it would have been a little different?

JC: I don't know whether...we might have had to walk all the way.

AC: They might have had to jump again!

JC: Yeah, we might have had to jump again.

AC: They were beginning to get very tired. And I'm convinced that some...because there were more jumps, but there were also more injuries of ankles and more injuries that year than there had been. I'm convinced the guys were getting very, very tired. They were just not as alert at avoiding stumps and trees. Because they were jumping very fast, I mean. If you listen to the '43 and '44 year men, they had many two, three jumps after their practice jumps. And these guys, you had one refresher jump. You had seven jumps, a refresher jump—

JC: Seven jumps and a refresher jump after Savenac. And eight smokes.

AC: Eight actual jumps. So it was a big year for most guys.

JC: But, for me individually, it left a really good taste in my mouth for CPS. We'd always—

RS: And Mennonites? Did you get along with the Mennonite boys?

JC: Oh, we got along fine with the Mennonites. They were amenable.

AC: In fact, some of Joe's...Hubey spent quite a bit of bit of time, whenever they did have time, Hubey would spend time with us. One of the concerns they had was that some of these Mennonite boys were young and really very—

JC: Unworldly.

AC: Unworldly. And really, the experience with girls just was something they had really very little knowledge.

RS: Very [unintelligible].

AC: Oh yeah. One time Joe and Hubey jumped to a three-man fire with this young fellow who really did not know anything. He just quizzed the guys and talked, and they came back feeling like fathers, having given him information that really should have. In some ways it was a wonder that some of them didn't really get into serious troubles. Because they were around

college girls and [were] inexperienced boys. I just don't think they had any idea, the adults, what they were putting these young fellows through.

RS: What the world was like.

AC: Well yes, and it was in a college atmosphere of girls who did not have many boys around. Joe and Hubey were concerned that some of the fellows did not know enough to really be...and I think from some of the fellows that I consider this my education, that some of the references to that, I was aware of that when they said it, I think it was their college education. Because for some of them, it was—

RS: Now both of you had your education.

AC and JC: Yes.

RS: Before this adventure came along.

AC: And were married. See, we will be married 45 years this October.

RS: And then you picked up where you had left off? Did you go back into teaching?

AC: It took a year for him to get out, by a whole set of circumstances.

JC: Took a long time to get out. Although I was at home I was not free. I didn't actually get my papers to get out and get a job. So I did some home construction, remodeling, things like that. And we had a little bit of a rough time getting readjusted. Then the next September—

AC: He went back to teaching.

JC: I went back—

AC: And we had a new baby then.

JC: We had another one and I went back and went to teaching at Montebello High School.

AC: And then I could—

JC: She started teaching after we found a nice housekeeper. And we went from there, so that actually, the fellows who had to come back and go to college and catch up three, four years of school, really had...the CPS men who had no government benefits really did have a tough time in that point of view. We felt extremely fortunate that we were equipped with the credentials needed to do what we wanted to do.

AC: Just before we left, our youngest daughter was saying to us, she said, "You know, I was reading," and she had saved it, "that government officials said that the work that the conscientious objectors did was of national importance and we probably couldn't have gotten along without it." And she said, "In view of that fact, I feel like that the CPS fellows from World War Two have a legitimate legal case to ask for benefits." She said, "I really want to talk to some lawyer friends about it." She said, "I feel like that's something that, even if they didn't win the case, should really be brought before the American people." She says, "People don't know that they didn't get benefits." I think it just doesn't occur to CPS people to think about that. But she has a legitimate point, that we maybe should be saying to society, are you aware that we did not have any...not only did we not have any salary, but we did not have any benefits.

RS: Nothing to help you with schooling.

JC: No.

AC: Nothing. Nothing.

JC: To return to life.

AC: Nothing to return to life. No GI benefits, nothing to help you get housing, for those who had to have education, nothing to get that education. We were some of the lucky ones. Most of the fellows we know were not through with their education. We did a lot of interesting work, in the television industry and things like that, but that's a whole other story. We did a lot of work with the black people in businesses and—

JC: Watts [The Watts race riot of 1965]

AC: Watts, down the Watts during the riots. So we've had an interesting life.

RS: So you came from California, you went back to California—

JC: Correct.

RS: Same area.

AC: And we live close to the same area. We go to the same Friends meeting that we were married in.

RS: I see our time is running out, and I thank you very much, both of you—

AC: Thank you.

JC: Thank you.

RS: Both of you for sharing here and for giving the Historical Society the benefit of your perspective on the smokejumper experience.

AC: Thank you, thank you.

[End of Interview]