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Interviewee: Bradshaw Snipes

Interviewer: Gregg Phifer

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Gregg Phifer: This is Gregg Phifer doing the interview, professor of communication at Florida State University in Tallahassee, and a former smokejumper myself. And my interviewee here is...please, identify yourself.

Bradshaw Snipes: I am Bradshaw Snipes. I live in Morrisville, Pennsylvania.

GP: One of the Pennsylvania finks, as we used to call them, there in CPS. Now, CPS, of course, means Civilian Public Service, which means that all of us assigned here were assigned because of religious convictions, at least as determined by the government. Tell us just a little bit about your own religious background, would you please?

BS: I was born a Quaker, or born into the Society of Friends. I seriously accepted the faith and tried to follow it out. My draft board begrudgingly gave me a classification of a conscientious objector, and it was pretty much on the basis that I believed what most Friends believe: that it was wrong to kill because we believe there was some of God in each person and we ought to do our best to follow out the dictates of what Jesus taught.

GP: Most of the men in the historic peace churches, at least in my observation, have not had much trouble getting the 4-E classification, which means a classification as a conscientious objector. You, of course, with your Quaker background, would fit within this category. And however begrudgingly your draft board acted, I assure you mine didn't act at all. A lot of those who were Methodists, or other non-historic peace churches were caught by the draft board and forced to appeal or to seek a hearing someplace in order to establish the faith. So you had no trouble getting the 4-E classification because, I suppose, of your background. Where were you assigned first, and when was this?

BS: I was assigned to a Friends-directed camp, under the Conservation Service in New York State. Big Flats. And this was in January of 1944. The work involved was primarily in the winter time, timber improvement stands, where we would cut out poorly grown trees and they would be cut in sections and auctioned off to various farmers.

GP: I came a little earlier than you, then, because I came in in December of '42. And I went to a Friends camp also, CPS 19. That was Buck Creek, North Carolina. And there were a lot of Friends in North Carolina. By Friends, I mean members of the Society of Friends, or in the vernacular, Quakers, of course. Well, so you were at Big Flats in '44. And had any of the men from Big Flats gone earlier to the smokejumpers?

BS: Not that I know of. Big Flats was primarily an acceptance camp, for assignees in the East, somewhat like Buck Creek was, I suppose. And it was a place from which people were transferred fairly regularly and readily. My younger brother and I were assigned to go to Elkton, Oregon. At the same time, or just prior to that, I had, let's say somewhere in February or March, applied to go to the smokejumpers. And the transfer to Elkton came first, so I was sent to Elkton, and a week later was sent eastward again, toward Montana.

GP: Oh, my. You did some travel, didn't you?

BS: Yeah.

GP: Well, I was sent from Buck Creek, which was about to be changed [the camp was closed in spring of 1943 and the men transferred] into Gatlinburg [Tenn.], sent from there to Coleville, California, CPS 37. Matter of fact, the Quakers of North Carolina wanted to stay near home if they could, or as close to home as they could, so they resisted vigorously the transfer to Coleville, and almost all the rest of us—39 or 40 of us—were transferred for firefighting out to Coleville, California. And I had a year there before going to the smokejumpers. Now, when you were at Big Flats, did you have any firefighting duty at all?

BS: No, we had none. I was only there for two or three months. And no training for that. Besides the timber stand improvement in the wintertime, the major production at Big Flats was a forestry seedling distribution center. They grew thousands and millions of young seedlings, and so during the growing months, which is roughly from March through the harvest—taking care of them up through November. A great deal of work was done in this very huge, over 100 acre, tree seedling nursery.

GP: Did you work in the nursery at all?

BS: No, I had no assignments in there—

GP: I did, at Savanac. I was there, a sad-sack from Savanac, planting those, doing the Savanac Stomp, as they called it. So you were at Elkton, Oregon for only a week. Now, Elkton would have been one of the fire camps...Coleville certainly was a camp where we fought a lot of fires. I fought several in North Carolina, and then more than that, of course, out there in California. You didn't have any fire duty in Elkton either, then.

BS: No. it was in the spring, and the men were primarily working on Forest Service roads. Getting out the windfalls and cleaning up whatever had to be done in very early spring.

GP: Well now, you had not had any experience with men from Big Flats going to smokejumpers. I had. Three or four, including Harry Burks, Bryn Hammarstrom, went from CPS 19 to the smokejumpers their first year. But I'd just been in a few months and didn't know much about it,

and certainly was not ready for a smokejumper experience in '43. But here in 1944, you were at Elkton for one week, and bang, you leave for the smokejumpers. How come? Why did you apply?

BS: Well, I applied at Big Flats, before I was sent—

GP: Oh yes, of course, of course.

BS: I had no reservations about coming here. Of course, the thing in the back of a lot of people's minds was, are you really afraid? Is that why you're a CO? I had already figured it out pretty well, by thinking of an example: If you saw a woman or a child fall down in the street and a street car was coming, you wouldn't let them stay there, you would do anything you could to get them out of the way of the streetcar. So I did have a pretty strong feelings that fear wasn't in any of my thoughts in regard to being a pacifist. I thought this was, coming to the smokejumpers, which, conceivably, could be dangerous, was one more way of showing that I was very much interested in doing something for the government. I had always been impressed by the CCC [Civilian Conservation Corps] program—

GP: Really?

BS: Yes.

GP: Back in the 1930s, the CCC. Now we followed them into many camps. Buck Creek, for example, is an old CCC camp. Big Flats too? Was Big Flats a former CCC camp?

BS: Yes.

GP: So we followed them into many of the projects and other things that they had established. We simply moved in to their camps when they were moving out and being phased out, or had been phased out some time earlier. Well, so you volunteered for the smokejumpers and came by train, by the way?

BS: Came by train and not knowing what to expect at all. [laughs]

GP: And were met at the train station in Missoula by the Forest Service personnel, somebody?

BS: That's right.

GP: Brought you out to Ninemile.

BS: That's correct, to Ninemile.

GP: And you trained there at Ninemile.

BS: Yeah.

GP: Well you were doing your training jumps and I was doing my refresher jumps, I suppose, at Ninemile, because I trained one year earlier. You were trained there at Ninemile and given the usual seven practice jumps. Now during the training period before the jumps, did you think you were in really good physical condition to undergo the kind of rather strenuous training we had for the smokejumpers?

BS: Oh, yeah. I accepted that. I was gung-ho. I had been playing lots of sports in college. At Big Flats we were out sawing, chopping every day, and I took this as a challenge. A lot of the exercises in the smokejumper training is what we had had in the fall time in football training and it was a challenge to be at your best.

GP: Was there any part of a training program that you remember particularly? Either favorably or unfavorably?

BS: Well, the toughest thing, I think, was jumping off of that tower—

GP: Agreed.

BS: And seeing the earth coming right up at you, and you dare not flinch or you weren't going in the position you should, and of course you'd get the tremendous crack in the back, instead of taking the jolt, distributing it over the whole body.

GP: I think that's where I got my shoulder pretty well battered, there in '44. I got my shoulder battered there once, and wound up in D-squad. Let's take those jumps now. Take, for example, the first jump. Were you riding the step for that first jump?

BS: No. I was a follower. Or, I wasn't the first one out.

GP: Neither was I. Harry Burks went out first and I went out second. And I always claim that he did the job of jumping for me on that—I simply mechanically followed him out.

BS: Well we had a reputation to follow there and we dare not let it down. The reputation was that no conscientious objector had ever refused to go out of an airplane.

GP: Far as I know that's still true.

BS: Yeah.

GP: All the way through our experience.

BS: And the challenge was, I'm in shape, I don't know what the heck's going to happen, but everyone else seems to enjoy it, and I'm going to do my best to enjoy it too. Of course, I was a little airsick, even on the first jump. So that put my senses a little bit in numbness, I think.

GP: Had you flown before you were up on the—

BS: No.

GP: Neither was I. Did they take you up for a ride first?

BS: I don't think so.

GP: They did us. I don't know quite why, but when we were ready to go out for our training jumps, they took us for a ride. They asked, have any of you not been up in a plane before? And I said, well, I haven't, and several others hadn't either. So they rode us up in a plane and brought us back again and then jumped us the first time. Now, how about that. Were there any of the training jumps that were particularly difficult for you? Any injuries, for example?

BS: No. No injuries. I think I had a common experience with a lot of others—you didn't know what to expect on the first one, and you went up there and it turned out to be pretty darn nice. And it was nicer coming down than riding around and circling in that airplane, as far as I was concerned. And, of course, we were nervous. The time element did not factor in at all. About the third jump, or the fourth jump is when things start to go a little funny, because if you left the airplane you wondered, the first time the time awareness started to come in, you wondered if that chute was going to open. That was a big apprehension I had at that time. After that it was pretty good. Landing in a tree was fun, but also I got seasick in the tree. The tree rocked me back and forth, it was a limber tree. The jumps—I think I came through them as I might have been expected. You learned how to roll, you might have had a bad jolt on one or two of them but you knew you better do a better job of rolling. The thing is, you had full confidence that these forest service men had done everything under the sun to do a good job of training us. They were us. It wasn't 'they.' We were part of a team and it is a thrilling experience to participate in this. And if you thought you were having a hard time, you knew everyone else was having just as hard a time. There was a comradery there.

GP: There certainly was. And I remember in about our third or fourth jump, one of those, we were going up with some veteran jumpers—I think they were on refresher—and they said, let's go up higher! So they took us up to 3,000 feet, which is more than we usually jumped from. And we had a little longer ride coming down. I think they enjoyed it very much, and I probably did too, by that time. We were supposed to head for a spot toward the center of the jumping field. How close did you come?

BS: I never hit the spot. I'm amazed how they do it now, with these chutes from—

GP: Well, the chutes are different. I've watched them do it, and it's amazing the different chutes they have. But on my third jump, I was lucky enough to drape my chute across the spot. Now you were successful at hanging up there. They told us, on about our fourth or fifth jump to be sure to hang up in this scrub timber over here. Be sure to hang up your chutes to have experience of the let-down procedure. And I steered for it hard, and I hit the timber all right, but my chute hit the side of a tree and just kind of slid down gently, so I was maybe a foot off the ground. And by the time I'd jumped a couple times, or tried to do anything with my chute, I was on the ground itself. But you hung up.

BS: I hung up and I was completely helpless. It wasn't a big tree. It was only about, oh, it was only about 30 or 40 feet tall. But maybe eight inches in diameter at the bottom. And, with a little bit of forward speed going into the tree, and I was fairly close to the top, nothing broke out at all. Chute draped down around me, and the tree just started to rock back and forth at a tremendous rate. And there's no way of stopping that tree at all from rocking; you're just hanging on to it. And I got seasick right in the top of the tree. That was the both funny in hindsight and terrible when it was happening.

GP: Looking back at it, you think it's funny. At the time I'm sure I would not have, especially if I had been there rocking in the tree. What happened?

BS: Well, bit by bit I was able to disengage myself from the chute, and just climb down the limbs of the tree. I didn't have to use the—

GP: Didn't use let-down procedure. In later jumps, did you hang up?

BS: Yes, I hung up beautifully in my first fire jump, up here at Seeley Lake. The first and only fire jump we had here at Seeley Lake. And fortunately, the rope was long enough to let me all the way to the ground. That was always the apprehension we had—

GP: Yes, I know.

BS: How long is that rope? [It] was 100 feet long, I think.

GP: Something like that.

BS: Yeah. And, anyway, what if it's not long enough? And then you start scratching it. Well you knew you had a buddy down there somewhere, so you might use pole trimer and come up and help you, but mine let me all the way to ground. But I did disengage myself from the chute in the tree and come down the rope. And I thought that was a good mastery experience.

GP: Good for you. Well, in 20 jumps, I never hung up. I was never very good in practicing that let-down procedure. I could stay up there and sweat and sweat and sweat and almost never get

down. But I did. I'd get down, but it'd be a sweating experience. And in 20 jumps I never hung up in a tree. Never once, on practice or fire, either one.

GP: Well, you went through the training program. After the training program, did you go out for a project for a while?

BS: Yes. We were assigned here to Seeley Lake, at the ranger station. I suppose there were 10 or 12 of us. Our primary job was to help maintain Forest Service trails, help them clean up the roads after they'd graded them, cut windfalls out of trails, reestablish telephone lines where they were down in the woods and that type of thing. This was a rather unburnable area up here. There were very few fires that any of our crew were sent on up here. I think we only averaged about one fire, all of us, up in this Seeley Lake area.

GP: Today we saw two fires, right from down near the lake. One that way and one the other way. Two fires in the same direction.

BS: Well, they're making up for it now.

GP: They really are. All right, you came up here to Seeley Lake, did many of the same things many of the rest of us have done, because I think I've done all the things that you named there, at one place or another. After you finished here with a project were you brought back to Missoula for jumping? Where did you jump out of?

BS: There's a little air field up here.

GP: Oh yes.

BS: Partly cow pasture too. Because we didn't get fire jumps up here, we had practice jumps. So of all the jumps—I had 12 all together—only two of them were fire jumps. One of them was a fire jump up here with Joe Osborn. He was the oldest man in our unit—

GP: Happy Joe.

BS: Happy Joe. And I think I was the youngest, and that was a good combination. Prior to our first fire jump up here, we had been sent out to look for a fire that was reported two or three weeks before and it was very rough weather. We never found the fire. We spotted one or two others, which people put out by foot trail. It was one of the roughest experiences I've ever had, and I didn't fare very well in that. I was as sick as I could be in that one.

GP: I don't know, I guess I was lucky that way, because I was out one day on patrol, practically the entire day in a Travel Air. A little bit rough, but I didn't get seasick. Was lucky—we stopped in at Grangeville, or someplace, probably had lunch there, and then took off again, and patrolled some more, and they finally dumped the two of us, Warren Downs and myself, on a

fire up in the Flathead. In fact, we were in Indian territory. I don't think the Indian service was very happy about having to pay the costs of our jump on that particular fire. All right, you had not so many fire jumps. You had a lot of practice jumps then.

BS: Yeah. So at the end of the season—

GP: The end of '44.

BS: Yes. After, let's say after Labor Day, whenever the fire season came, they start pulling people back to the Missoula area. We stayed at Ninemile. But there were fires popping out in a lot of other areas, and so we were all on standby. And we'd be brought in and stay at standby a couple days, right at the airport, and one night...the last fire jump I got on, and the biggest one, was the Bell Lake fire, which was the end of '44.

GP: 29 jumpers—

BS: 29 jumpers, that's exactly right, and that was the biggest number of men on a fire, I think. That was an amazing experience. We'd been told to go eat supper about 7 o'clock, I suppose, and so we were all in a diner, getting a good fill on crab salad and things like that. And all of a sudden, the Forest Service truck came up and says, "Ok fellows, it's time to go." So we ended up—and this was down in the Bitterroot Valley. We went down the Bitterroot Valley, it was right on the boundary line between Idaho and Montana. And it was both interesting and there was a lot of apprehension because you could see the sun going down behind the mountain. The sky was light, it was getting quite dark down below. But we did see this fire just creeping around all over it. It wasn't in the tree tops, but it was a typical night time fire, so we knew there'd be no danger of burning up if we landed inside of it or outside of it. But after the spotter dropped the test chute, to see how the air was drifting, it did put us in the position that we ended up jumping over a lake—

GP: Boy, scary.

BS: In order to land in a spot between the lake and the fire. All that went according to Hoyle too. Everyone landed on land, and unfortunately I was in the last batch to jump, and since my ability to get airsick is always great, whether it's a nervous stomach or something else that's going wrong I don't know, but I had a terrible jump on that. For some reason I went out head first, as the last jumper. And I threw up as I jumped. So my mask was pretty full of stuff, and came down and I thought I was coming down quite nicely, and hit and took the top out of a very tall spruce tree—there were quite a few spruce down around the lake there. And I didn't know it was breaking up, but all of a sudden I realized I was going very fast backwards, and fortunately the chute had time to catch air again before I hit the ground, but it took out about the top four inches of the tree. And so the landing wasn't bad, it was in some windfall, and then we had to scurry like anything to assemble ourselves together because it was dark down there. Were you on that fire?

GP: No I wasn't. I think I was in some other either just before or just about the same time. So I did not get on Bell Lake. 29 people. Lot of them. That's the biggest fire of the year, I'm sure.

BS: Yeah. And that was—

GP: How long did it take to put it out?

BS: We were there—it's hard to get all the memories straight—I think it was four days. I remember working until about 3 o'clock in the morning the first night, then we were knocked off—

GP: Did you get a line around it that time?

BS: No.

GP: No?

BS: No. I don't know who called the shots. We did have a crew leader—

GP: Oh [unintelligible] foreman.

BS: Yeah. But we worked around quite a bit of it. And it was way too big to master in one night or one day, practically. I remember trying to find a place to sleep that night and I picked what seemed to be a game trail going across the mountain. Everything else was fairly steep there, so I bedded down in that. And I woke up about 5 o'clock in the morning, seeing some hooves walking right alongside my head. And somehow, a packer had been going for, oh, a good 24 hours or so with a string of fire equipment [that] was coming in there, and I was laying in the trail. Of course the packer didn't see me. The mules saw me, stepped out to one side—

GP: That was nice of them.

BS: —and the whole string walked right by my head. So that was interesting. Well the next day, we thought we had the fire licked. We really thought we were making progress. We had the stepped up progression line...What was the system we called?

GP: Oh I remember it, I don't know the name for it.

BS: The last guy back when he's finished up, we call a number and we'd all advance to the next section that was...real good progression. We were starting to pull in at the top, and make a small apex at the top, from a broad base at the bottom. About 2 o'clock in the afternoon, the wind started to come up and we could see a little spark jump over every now and then, and we'd run back and beat that one out. You can just imagine what's happening—you're beating

more sparks out behind you. Bit by bit, it started to jump up a little more. Just about the time it exploded, and I mean exploded—I'd never even dreamed this could happen. You hear people talking about it, you don't know if they're exaggerating or not, but the fire just got in the treetops and you couldn't care, tell, if it was air exploding or the needles in the tree exploding, but the fire was just like a big wave going through there. Just at that time, a forest ranger from Idaho showed up on the scene, from some trail. He said he was in charge, and we said, fine, what do we do?

He looked at the fire and he said, "To hell with the fire, run to the creek and save your lives." So that was my experience on a big fire.

GP: What happened finally with that fire, anyway? They bring in some other crews to control it, or what?

BS: About the third day, quite a few. I'd say 25 to 50 men had been walked into it. I think this was about 16 miles from the nearest road, down near Lake Como, and they showed up and apparently there were other fires...And we stayed around for half a day and they pulled us off and told us to go back. Those fellows had to mop it up. But we had, with the help of those fellows and ourselves, as I recall, in a half a day's time, we had got to the peak, or the apex of this fire creeping up the hillside and had surrounded it. They were mopping up in the sense, is what happened, I think.

GP: Well of course, the smokejumper advantage was all gone after the other people arrived by foot. Walking in 16 miles is quite a hike and by the time you get through with that you're not ready to tackle a fire hard, so I'm glad you were able to get that under control before you had to leave. That was our experience most of the time. A few times we had to mop up the fire ourselves. I remember the first time I was on a fire, I must have spent nearly a week there, on K-rations and whatever else they dropped to us. In fact, they dropped us some ham sandwiches, which the bears got.

BS: Oh my goodness.

GP: So we were feasting on K-rations the whole time. We were there for quite a long time. Finally put out a big tree, a big snag with some fire established in it.

BS: The interesting thing in this fire was the planning that the Forest Service had in the background, which was put into practice. They dropped the whole fire kitchen unit, assigned a person to be the cook—

GP: By air, of course.

BS: By air. They dropped all sorts of food. You ate like kings out there.

GP: Oh I know, on fires.

BS: Yeah. The biggest problem we had...two big problems. One was to get marine pumps going, to pump water out of the creek.

GP: Oh the creek, sure. You had water there!

BS: We had water—

GP: Most fires I was on, we had no water anywhere near it.

BS: Well, we had one pump dropped that didn't work. They dropped another, and then they started dropping radios. And I think the third or fourth radio finally worked. The others got smashed. And the one that worked was put in the middle of a great big cargo of loaves of bread, as a cushion. Of course, it had a parachute on it anyway. And we ended up with a second pump, which transferred the water still farther up the hill. We dug out a little pool and put the water still farther up. But the radio not working and, if we were depending on water, we just didn't have enough logistics to do the job for that.

GP: Water was very seldom used while on the back country. In all my firefighting for the smokejumpers, I never once used water. I did that a couple of times earlier, in California, and also in North Carolina, fighting fires using water with a backpack or a marine pump. But never on the smokejumpers. This was unusual to have that. Well, you had...how many jumps that first year, 1944?

BS: 12 jumps.

GP: And you did not...'45 you were not here, or were you?

BS: '45 I was here, and in the wintertime I was assigned to the Forest Service winter range, for horses and mules and colts out at Perma, Montana. And I had a little accident there—we were moving some big pieces of timber around, and whatever caused it, I don't know, but I ended up with a hernia. Had an operation, and they would not let me jump the coming year. So I was then assigned to a lookout tower for 1945.

GP: Oh. Where were you in lookout tower, where was this?

BS: One was at Falls Point. Now, I've never located that on a normal civilian map, but it's somewhere east of the Morrell lookout tower, over here, that Joe Osborn was on. And it's over toward the Lincoln area, as I recall. And that was a central headquarters for a lot of the area in the Swan Range, and going up to Glacier Park and over toward the benchmark ranger station on the other side, toward Augusta. I was there as an assistant with another old timer who'd done a lot of this work on lookouts and had experience with radios and telephones. I stayed with him

for a month and then was reassigned to Prairie Reef, which was out of the ranger station near Augusta. The Benchmark Ranger Station. And that was a beautiful site there. You can look across and see Great Falls, at least the smokestack of the sugar beets [the smokestack was from the Anaconda Co. refinery], 75 miles away, on clear days. Tremendous views. That was just on the east side of the continental divide, and you could look up into Glacier and you could really see some rough stuff in there.

GP: I'm sure you could. How about fires, any of those?

BS: Yes and no. The most unique fire I picked up off of the—I call it the compass board, they had a different name for it at that time—was after a lightning storm and they asked us to pay particular attention to smoke shooting up. And I was able to see something way over on the other side of Prairie Reef—over toward the, not the Mission Range, I think, but in the northwesterly direction. And that was a lot of miles away, and no one else had reported this. And they told me to be careful and make sure it wasn't fog coming up or mist coming up. Well, I told them it sure looked like smoke to me. And they had someone else from another lookout tower get a cross-bearing on it, and he verified that he thought it was smoke too. Now, neither one of us had any records of seeing lightning come down there, but by looking at the chart of prior strikes back a month earlier, in that same line, was a strike one month earlier.

GP: A month earlier?

BS: A month earlier. And the assumption that we heard from the Forest Service was that—and this can happen—lightning strikes in the duff, and either it's wet enough so nothing much happens for a while, until it smolders for a while and then you get some wind behind it later and it breaks out in a new spot. And they think that's what happened. I had another fire blow up right under my face, almost, which was a vacationer fire down near Benchmark Ranger Station. I did not see that fire when it started. And the ranger station called me, and they said, "Do you see a fire down here?" And I said, "No, I don't." And they said, "Look again," and I looked again and I could not see anything. There was a pretty good-sized ridge between us. And then about 15 minutes later, I said, "I see some smoke drifting in a certain direction." And it just mushroomed. That turned out to be a several-hundred-man fire, I think. And it was completely obliterated to me.

GP: The ridges blocked your view.

BS: I assume that was it, because I certainly didn't see it when it was a baby. It was an awful big thing by the time I was able to see it, or the smoke from it.

GP: How much training did you get for your work as a lookout, forest lookout?

BS: A very nice supervisor from the Forest Service went up with me to both lookout towers and explained a lot of things. And the man I was assisting on the first lookout at Falls Point was...he

knew the ropes quite well, and there were disciplines we'd go through. Washing windows, what things to look for and expect during a storm.

GP: What about washing windows in a lookout? That is kind of scary to me.

BS: Well, it had to be done. That wasn't the biggest factor. The biggest factor was how far you had to carry water to wash the windows.

GP: Oh.

BS: There's where you built discipline, and I think we used a lot more water on the windows than we did on any toilet or cooking needs. You learned to really conserve water. We had to carry it quite a ways.

GP: Couple miles, maybe?

BS: At Prairie Reef, I think it was two miles. That was a good little hike.

GP: it certainly would be, carrying water all the way.

BS: Five gallons of water. You'd want it to last more than a day if you could.

GP: I would think so. I bucked around a backpack there, for a little while, in one fire in North Carolina. Quite a few men were on that fire and I carried a backpack for a while. I tell you, carrying a back of water is quite some work.

GP: Okay. Well you were, let's see, '45 then, you were on the fire tower because of the injury, the hernia operation they would not let you jump in '45. Assigned you to fire tower there. After the fire season was over and the fire towers were no longer needed, what did you do then?

BS: I had some furlough coming, and I ended up at this camp where we all finally got transferred out of. I forget the name of it. It's amazing how I've forgotten...that name didn't mean anything to me. It was somewhere northwest of here, I think.

GP: If we're talking about a CPS, it would be Savanac. It was the final—

BS: Savanac. That's it.

GP: Well I worked out there, remember. I was assigned there, and was working in the nursery and planting trees. So Savanac was a familiar name to me. Savanac nursery. And that's where CPS 103 ended. And that was where you last worked, in CPS, your last assignment.

BS: Yes. And I assumed I was doing mostly woodwork, cutting wood or something like that there. And I remember there were some Italian interns contained there, in some sort of sleeping cars or living cars or something. I remember seeing them during the Christmas season. We went and visited a few of them at one time. [The Italians were among about 1,000 civilian Italian aliens held at Fort Missoula from 1941 through 1944. A few work crews continued to be detained through 1945.]

GP: I didn't have any contact with any of them. On the big fire up at Meadow Creek that I was on, they brought in some Blister Rust boys, a couple crews of them, maybe three crews of them. They brought a lot of Mexican workers from the sugar beets and elsewhere—I don't know what all they were working on. They brought in large number of crews—in fact, we had a military unit or two. Brought in from one of the military bases to fight that particular fire. But I never saw either German or Italian internees, or prisoners of war, either one. We tell me, however, that one of our projects, the one I worked on the winter of... I guess it must have been '44, at the Lozeau, Montana, the bridge project, was finished up by German prisoners of war. So we got in all the piling, we got in the center place where they were going to put the center prop to—they have a name for it. I'm not enough of a bridge man to know, but I worked at it for a while—and then the German prisoners of war finished up the bridge. One of the men here at this reunion tells me they drove across it the other day. So it's still operational, that bridge we built in Montana, Lozeau, Montana. [The German prisoners were held at the Quartz Guard Station in Mineral County.]

GP: Well, after the smokejumpers, you were released from CPS. What then?

BS: I was transferred back to Big Flats, and I had the opportunity to apply for the cattle boats. And that came fairly fast as an assignment. I think by February.

GP: Now this is...assignment to a cattle boat was from the religious organization, not the government?

BS: That's hard to say. Going back to Big Flats was sort of a collecting area in the east—

GP: That was a government assignment. Selective Service.

BS: Yes, that was a Selective Service. And I don't recall at this time. Of course, the cattle boat thing was run by the Brethren Service Committee. And whether we applied to them or whether we applied to the government, I forget at this stage.

GP: I think it probably was a religious organization, but I can't swear to that because I never was on a cattle boat. I read about the project a little bit, and heard several people here talk about being on the cattle project, but I didn't know a great deal about it. Where did you go with the cattle boat? You went there with them?

BS: Yes. I had four trips. We went once to Bremerhaven, which took cattle to...railed them down to Czechoslovakia.

GP: That's German, Bremerhaven is in Germany?

BS: Bremerhaven's in northern Germany. And the other three trips were to Poland, to Danzig. Gdynia was completely destroyed, and so they were brought in to Danzig. Horses and cows. Cows lived better than the horses did. Canadian horses were in much better shape and lived better than the horses taken out of Norfolk, Virginia. That was interesting. We had many interesting experiences. The first two trips, the young boys from the various churches, peace churches, were enthusiastic. Most of them were from farms, I guess, so it was a wonderful thing. They could handle those animals. About the time they started to go back to school, or had put in one or two trips, then the manpower situation was rather short and that's when whoever was doing the hiring started to drag people off the docks. And we got a rare collection of people. I was one of the few people who had come from a farm. I knew how to take care of baby chicks, on one trip, so I did end up being a supervisor the last two times. And that was a status situation, which I just couldn't believe that I was finally in a status situation. Had opportunities to talk to the chief mate and the engineer and tell them your needs and see if they could help you. That was a big jump forward.

GP: After many years of being the underling.

BS: Yeah. That was great.

GP: Well good for you. You made four trips with the cattle boats. That took you another year or so? How long?

BS: That took about six months. And fortunately for me, my release came just about the time Guilford College was opening up in early September, and so I was able to go right down there—

GP: North Carolina.

BS: Yeah, and start...and get back into college again. I had been there two and a quarter years before.

GP: I see. So you were again a junior, going back to school, there at Guilford College, which is a Friends School by the way. The former president of Guilford College, Raymond Binford, was my director at CPS 19.

BS: That's right. He was a grand old man.

GP: Oh yes. Grand old man and also a man of very strong convictions, and also a man who had his ideas about what CPS ought to be like. And some of those did not mesh with the ideas of some of the people assigned there to CPS 19.

[The last 10-15 seconds of this interview are inaudible]

[End of Interview]