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Interviewee: Tom Summers

Interviewer: Gregg Phifer

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Gregg Phifer: Gregg Phifer, of the Florida State University in Tallahassee, doing the interviewing. And I'm talking to...

Tom Summers: Tom Summers.

GP: From where?

TS: Reno, Nevada.

GP: My, one of the far West people, and I'm the far East. Well, we're talking about the experience in the CPS smokejumpers, CPS USFF [USFS] smokejumpers, and because this is CPS, that means, of course, that all of us were certified, pure and segregated CPS, by the federal government. And what was your own religious background?

TS: I was raised as a child in the South in the Christian Church, but I moved to California as a 13-year-old, and pretty much lost any kind of formal religious connection or affiliation. I suspect that my religious background leading up to my CPS assignment was based upon philosophical, personal philosophical, and historical reading. I was quite surprised when I had no difficulty getting a 4-E classification out of San Diego, California, in 1942.

GP: Didn't even have to appeal at all.

TS: No appeal, no hearing, nothing. I simply sent in my statement and back came my 4-E classification.

GP: You were lucky. Many people are not that fortunate.

TS: Well, I had another experience in 1948, which wasn't quite as fortunate. They were tempted to reinduct me in 1948, 1-A, but I fought that off also.

GP: Good for you. All right, you got your 4-E classification, back in what time? What date? '40—

TS: It was at the end of '42.

GP: Yes. And where were you assigned first?

TS: I was actually inducted in October of '43, and was assigned to CPS 37, in Coleville, California.

GP: That's a long time, my. How come you had such a long time between the time they classified you and you were inducted?

TS: Who can explain the Selective Service system?

GP: Almost impossible. Anyway, I got in in December of 1942, myself, and I was on the group that came to Coleville, California, from Buck Creek, Marion, North Carolina. How long did you spend at Coleville?

TS: Well, I was assigned to the unit for almost two years, but I spent only, probably, two or three months in Coleville itself.

GP: So where did you go?

TS: I went up to Galena Creek, south of Reno, Nevada, and I was assigned to a cartographic project there. We were making maps from aerial photographs of Tahoe National Forest.

GP: Beautiful country. Beautiful country. I was assigned to Dog Valley myself, for a while, the Dog Valley pumpers, supposed to be the fast unit to go all over the region fighting fires, and then they found out they had other firefighters available. So they transferred a number of us out, and I went to the far south one, and I was at Mammoth Lakes for quite a while, before coming to smokejumpers. All right, had any of the men you knew from Coleville applied for the smokejumpers earlier? How did you heard about this?

TS: Oh, I suppose it came through the flyers that circulated among the various CPS units. I applied originally in the late spring of '44. In fact, I was reviewing some of the correspondence to my family the other day, but I had apparently applied too late in the spring of '44. My application arrived too late. So I reapplied the following year, and was assigned, actually, beginning the first of April in 1945.

GP: That was a really big unit, '45. Much larger than the earlier ones. All right, you traveled from Reno, did you, to Missoula?

TS: From Reno. Went from Reno to Salt Lake City to Missoula by train.

GP: Yes, so did I.

TS: Surprisingly, I had injured myself skiing several weeks before this and got off the train in Missoula on crutches.

GP: Oh no! I bet they were glad to see that.

TS: Yes, much to the surprise of the reception committee. But it was not a serious injury, it was a torn ligament that was swollen and discolored, but I went through the training in April and completed five training jumps before I had an axe injury to my leg, which made me lay over into May. And I took my final two training jumps in May, and then was assigned to McCall, Idaho.

GP: We were trained, however, at Ninemile, is that right, with everybody else?

TS: That's right, in Camp Menard.

GP: And you had five jumps there, at the beginning. Say just a word about...well, first talk about the training period. Do you remember anything particular about the training given you as a smokejumper? You'd been around pretty long, you were in pretty good physical condition, I suppose, by the time you came to Missoula, except for your crutches.

TS: No, I didn't find it particularly demanding. Except for the injury. I limped along during the hikes and the physical training, but I had no doubts really that I'd be able to make it if my ankle held up, which it did. By the time we actually began jumping, I had no problem with the landings at all. I'm not a particularly strong person, I probably weighed 140-42 pounds in those days, but I didn't find it overly demanding. And I don't recall that any of my squadmates did either. Seemed to me we went through it quite easily.

GP: Did you enjoy the tower jump the rest of us did?

TS: I can't say I enjoyed it, no. But it didn't terrify me.

GP: Didn't terrify me either—

TS: We did have one young man, though, who was terrified enough of it that he...sitting around the barracks several nights before our first jump, we were speculating upon how strong the impact would be upon landing, and someone commented, perhaps a squad leader, said that it was like jumping off of a 12-foot height. After the breakup of the group that evening, this young man went out onto the roof of the barracks—

GP: [laughs] Yes?

TS: You remember that story?

GP: No, I don't.

TS: Jumped off the roof and broke his ankle.

GP: Oh no.

TS: So he never did finish. As I recall, he was assigned to a lookout for the rest of the summer.

GP: Yes. Well, you got through the training period, how about the jumps? Now, you got five jumps before you had another injury—you had several in a succession there. Before you had your next injury, you had five jumps. Do you remember that first jump at all? Do you have any memories of it?

TS: Yes, I remember. That was terrifying. I remember sitting in that Ford Trimotor, I think I was about number six in the group to go out, and as I watched the first two or three go out, I suddenly realized what I had involved myself in, and asked myself the eternal question, “How did I get here?” And, “*Why* did I get here?” But, of course, once my turn came on the line and I was out of the airplane, then I was so supercharged with adrenaline that nothing really concerned me after that. I had no difficulties. I had one Eagle parachute jump.

GP: Oh really? I never did.

TS: Yep. It was quite interesting, because I had met a young woman in Missoula, at a skating rink. And had dated her a couple of times, and she expressed interest in coming out to Ninemile and watching a jump. So we arranged to get her out to the camp, and unbeknownst to me, the crews on the flatbed who were assigning parachutes gave me an Eagle.

GP: And didn't you know it, didn't know?

TS: Oh no, I had no idea. I had jumped previously with the Irvin. And everything they said about Eagles was true. It opened with an enormous pop, and brought each shoulder around in front to meet the other. It was really a very hard opening. The landing was fairly standard, but the opening was quite attention grabbing.

GP: I'm sure it would be.

TS: That was the only one. I made no fire jumps with an Eagle.

GP: The rest are all Irvin. Yes. Well, I used a slotted Irvin all the way through. On a couple of my jumps, I think some of the veteran jumpers asked for an Eagle. They had jumped it before, wanted to try it again, and so they asked for it. I didn't ask for it.

TS: No, I recall that too. A number of people did it out of bravado, I think. I didn't have that much bravado. All I had was ignorance and the desire to show off to this young woman.

GP: The Eagle chute, however, is a very pretty one. If you watch the movie—

TS: Yes it is.

GP: It's lovely. Has a breeze and moves around, much more than the Irvin, which is rather—

TS: It's more reminiscent of the sports parachutes that are being used nowadays, for sport jumping.

GP: Any other particular memories of the training period, the training jumps?

TS: Well, the injury might be worth noting. There was a crew foreman, a man named Dale Fickle. Dale was from McCall, and as it turned out, took his whole squad back to McCall with him when the training ended. But Dale gave us most of our classroom training, including First Aid and tool safety. And he had given us a half day and set of instructions on tool safety the day before my injury. And the way that occurred was, I jumped at Ninemile and came down in a lodgepole pine. My chute draped over the top of a lodgepole. But I was just barely off the ground, my feet almost touching, so I got out of the harness very quickly and easily. But we had been instructed over and over to be very careful about damage to the parachutes. To get them out of the trees as safely as possible and with as little damage as possible. So took a double-bitted axe and began to cut down this lodgepole, which was perhaps six or eight inches in diameter at the base, constantly looking up at the lodgepole to see which direction it was going to come, and if I could cushion it.

My intention was to, when it started to fall, to cushion it with my hands as long as I could. Well when the tree started to topple, I let go of the axe and it pinched. The double bitted axe pinched in the [unintelligible]. And I was looking up, of course, watching the parachute, watching the angle of the tree, and apparently threw myself against that other bit of the axe, which was pinched in the tree. I didn't even realize it until my boot half filled up with blood, and I looked down and here was this gash across my right knee, through my Levis. It wasn't a serious injury by any means, but it did incapacitate me for the last two jumps. It did teach me one other thing. I have only one allergy in life, and that's sulfur. In those days, sulfa drugs were the common curative means for almost any open wound. I had the most horrendous reaction to sulfa drugs that I've ever had in my life. That's the only thing I've ever been sensitive to. Anything with a sulfur additive. K-rations, you recall, had a lot of sulfur preservatives in them. I could hardly eat K-rations. The candy bar was compressed fruit and that kind of thing, with sulfur preservative. I was simply unable to eat them.

GP: Do you mean to tell me that after your squad leader gave you a full half day on tool safety, and then the next day you got your cut, and he still took you back to McCall with you?

TS: Yes.

GP: How come?

TS: He was a bigger fool than I was, I guess. Yes, they carried me to a truck and the truck took me back to Ninemile and the two men carried me into the First Aid room, and there was Dale, waiting for me with this horrified expression on his face. Didn't teach me a thing, obviously.

GP: You hung up on that particular jump. Was that when you were instructed to hang up, or was it just—

TS: No, no, we had made the open field jumps. I think the fifth one was—I don't know whether I drifted into these lodgepoles or whether we were jumping into thin timber or what. I don't recall that at those point, but it certainly was not my intention to hang up in the lodgepole.

GP: I'm sure it was not.

TS: As a matter of fact, in 14 jumps, seven training and seven fire jumps, I only landed in trees twice. That was one, and then I landed in a snag on a fire jump that just tore the parachute all to pieces. There was no way it could have been salvaged from that. But two out of 14 isn't bad.

GP: No, that's pretty good. However, I had zero out of 20. No hang up. I even tried to hang up on the jumps we were supposed to and couldn't do it. You got your final two jumps at McCall, did you?

TS: No, I laid over 'till May. The training groups, you'll recall, were a month each.

GP: Oh yes.

TS: And I was with the April group initially, laid over until May, and when the May training group had its sixth and seventh jumps at Ninemile, I had completed mine there, and then went to McCall at the end of May.

GP: All right, you're assigned to McCall, McCall, Idaho. Tell me a little bit of your impressions of McCall. I've not talked to anyone who's been there.

TS: Well I just came through McCall, two or three days ago. Spent a whole day visiting the administration building and the loft and the radio room out at McCall airport. It hasn't changed all that much. There are new buildings. There's a new loft. The airport's changed considerably. It wasn't even paved in '45, but now the Forest Service seems to have its own runway. Paved runway separate from the main airport. We were very well received by the young men who were in the radio room, and by several of the old timers. I had a very good talk with a man named Bill Yinson, from San Diego. He's a teacher in San Diego. He's been jumping professionally in the summer since 1953. That makes him a 33-year jumper. And he told us he had made 180 jumps. 180 fire jumps. On the wall of the administration building in McCall there were plaques for large numbers of jumps, and I think the largest—one individual, by 1984, had

made 350 fire jumps. But this was to be Bill's last year. He was to retire this year, so the resident old timer won't be there next year.

GP: That rather pales our seven or ten fire jumps. I guess a few of the smokejumpers from CPS days made a few more than that, but not dramatically so. 180 fire jumps. That's a lot of them. Do you remember your first fire jump?

TS: I'm not sure I remember the first one.

GP: Remember another one then.

TS: No, I can't honestly say. I remember them, but I can't quite remember the order they were in.

GP: All right, pick one you like.

TS: Well, the most memorable was probably the last one, because the fire season was pretty well over. It was into mid-September, perhaps. And we hadn't had many fire jumps the last few weeks. And a call came in that there was a fire on the Imnaha River, over in eastern Oregon. So four jumpers went in two Travel Airs. We took off from McCall airport. And as soon as we had reached several thousand feet of elevation and headed west toward Oregon, we could see the smoke. Which was probably 150 miles away. So the pilot radioed back to the McCall dispatcher, and said, "Look, that's an enormous fire, we can tell already, four jumpers aren't going to make any difference at all on that fire." To which the dispatcher replied, "Well, they haven't got anything else to do anyway; they're just going to be sitting around here at McCall, you might as well jump them." So we did, we flew over across the Snake into eastern Oregon on the Imnaha River, and we circled for quite a while, dropping test chutes, because the wind was shifting very badly, and that's rimrock country. I don't know whether you've ever jumped over there Gregg—

GP: Never have.

TS: You have precipitous rock for 20, 30 feet, vertical, and then slopes, and then vertical rock and slopes and vertical rock. So this rim rock is very tricky to jump into anyway, and no sooner had we parachuted, the two of us in one Travel Air, then the wind shifted and we came down with no visibility through the smoke. We didn't know where the rimrock was and where the slope was and where the fire was. We got all of us down on the same side, we got out of our gear, and the fire was totally out of control, and we were quite terrified. We immediately got down to the creek, fairly good-sized creek, across from the fire, and started digging in. We were quite concerned the fire would jump that creek. We dug foxholes for our equipment, and for ourselves, out in the middle of a big green meadow. We thought the meadow wouldn't burn. Fortunately it never did get to that point, but it was a very frightening experience. The four of us were on that fire, I think almost a full 24 hours before a foot crew came in. And I think before

that fire was out, there were several hundred men on it. I can't recall the exact dimensions of it, but it was a very large fire.

GP: Four men didn't make a great deal of difference, I guess.

TS: Four men didn't even make a dent in that fire. All we could do was protect ourselves.

GP: But the McCall, the ranger there, said, "Let them go in and jump. Might as well have four people on the fire as nobody."

TS: Well, and I don't think it was really all that distasteful to us because things were getting quite boring at the end of the fire season. It was either parachute into the Imnaha River or sharpen tools at the tool shed for next season and we were still pretty happy to jump in those days.

GP: All right, what kinds of projects did you have, aside from the jumping?

TS: As opposed to Coleville, California, where we had all sorts of conservation projects, I don't recall anything except tool work, maintenance work around. We did a little bit of construction on the barracks. I don't recall ever being assigned anywhere off the smokejumper camp.

GP: You were really, then, doing smokejumper work associated with—sharpening tools and so forth.

TS: You will recall that was a very busy fire season. I think we had no more than 16 or 20 jumpers at McCall, and we were going out pretty regularly. So that when we came back from, say, a four, five, six-day trip, there were several days of recuperation and catch up. As I recall, let's see, June, July—three months, three and a half months, we were jumping seven, that means you're jumping every two or three weeks, and sometimes you're gone for almost a week.

GP: That's right, by the time you get back to base.

TS: When I came through McCall the other day, they told me they were authorized to have 80 jumpers this summer, which would be four times as many as we had in '45. But they only had, I believe, 70, because several had washed out and there had been an injury or two. But 70 jumpers can sit around for quite a while if there's no big work to do. But 20 jumpers keep pretty busy.

GP: I'm sure they did. I remember, we had a lot more than that in Ninemile and Montana, Missoula. That's Region 1. You were in Region 4, weren't you?

TS: That's correct.

GP: Well Region 1 had more jumpers than you did in those days, but we still went around in circles pretty rapidly. I got seven jumps that particular summer.

TS: Almost everyone I've talked with made seven jumps that year.

GP: Magic seven.

TS: In fact, I've never met anybody who had more, have you? That summer?

GP: I suspect some of the men who were assigned in Missoula itself probably had a few more. I was out at Savenac and then coming back to Ninemile and then into Missoula. And some of the men, I think, probably did a few more than that, but not many more. The largest fire you were on was this last one, is that right?

TS: The largest active fire. After that, the end of September or early October, was the Caribou Creek fire. I can't remember which National Forest that was in—

GP: One forest delves in another. I have a hard time separating one from the other.

TS: Well, it was in Idaho, I'm quite sure of that. And it wasn't all that far from McCall. But that fire was quite large, and, again, I suppose several hundred men were on it at its peak. But after it was contained and pretty well suppressed and the foot crews came out, they sent eight of us smokejumpers in on foot. That was the only fire that we had to approach on foot. And we hiked in a considerable distance, some 12 or 15 miles. It was high on some ridges. And our function on Caribou Creek was to simply make sure that it was dead out. So we patrolled the perimeter of it for two days, and then the weather turned nasty and we had actually snow. So we hiked out, I think on the third day, in about six inches of snow. That was early October.

GP: That doesn't sound like a very efficient use of smokejumpers though, to hike in 12 miles and then patrol the fire to see that it wasn't breaking over the lines.

TS: Well, by October, generally, lightning fire had pretty much diminished. We didn't like it, I must say that. Nobody was happy about hiking in.

GP: I'm sure it wouldn't be. I had a lot of hiking fires in my day, mostly I guess in Buck Creek, North Carolina, and then Coleville, California, where we had a lot of fires we hiked in to. Any other of the fires that you remember particularly, that were especially interesting for one reason or another? Were most of yours a two-man, three-man fires set by lightning?

TS: I would say, of the seven fire jumps, one, two, three were two-man jumps. And four were, well, the Imnaha there were four of us. I believe Moose Creek there were six or eight of us. I suppose three out of the seven were two-man jumps. And I like two-man jumps. I was quite

fond of those. You could go in there and take a couple of days to do the job right. You didn't have to work yourself to death, but you had something to do. And usually there was a long hike out to the nearest air strip or town, and you could do a little fishing on the way. Those were almost vacations, compared to those big fires.

GP: They used to fly us back from Grangeville. I wonder where you would go for landing strip, to go back to McCall.

TS: I'm trying to remember. We came out of the middle fork of the Salmon River at least twice. In fact, I remember on, let's see, the atom bomb was dropped on Hiroshima on August 6, I believe.

GP: I was in Missoula at the time and heard Harry Truman make the announcement.

TS: Well, I was on a two-man fire at the time.

GP: I was ready to go out. The next day I went out, I'm sure.

TS: Well, I remember when we hiked out to this middle fork of the Salmon River airstrip, the pilot had a can of beer in his hands. He was alone, didn't have a copilot with him, no spotter, just the plane come in to pick us up. And he was quite happy, and I asked, "What's the occasion?" And he says, "Well," he says, "we think the war's over." Said, "The atom bomb's been dropped on Hiroshima, and it looks like the war will be over very shortly." Well this didn't make us too happy—the can of beer, I suppose, didn't make us too happy—because that's very tricky flying country up in there. So I think, probably, this date was about August 7 or 8, wasn't necessarily the day that the bomb was dropped. But this was how I received the news of that event.

GP: Out in the wilderness country, coming back from a fire.

TS: Something else I might mention about that. Do you remember in June, I believe it was, of '45, a private airplane with a very wealthy lumberman had disappeared? I can't remember whether it was in Montana or Idaho. His pilot had taken him in somewhere to survey some lumber that he was going to contract for, and the plane just totally disappeared. And it wasn't found for weeks and weeks, and a sheepherder stumbled on the remains of the airplane, and when the investigators came in and looked at it, they assumed that the pilot had turned up a blind creek, trying to fly as those bush pilots do, turning up creeks to gain altitude and then going out over the dead end of the canyon with an updraft. But the speculation, I recall, at the time was that this pilot had misjudged the canyon up which he had turned. It wasn't the one on he was seeking. It suddenly narrowed on him, he was unable to climb out of it, he was unable to turn, and in the effort to turn the airplane crashed and the pilot and this lumberman were killed.

Well, shortly before this August 7 or 8 event, which we learned about the atom bomb and Hiroshima, the news of this lumberman's plane had come to the smokejumpers. We'd heard about this. So when we took off with this pilot on this Travel Air with this can of beer in his hand, we took off from this airstrip and he drifted out over the Salmon River and began to fly upstream, gaining altitude as best he could, and we flew this way for several miles, we were perhaps halfway up the ridge. And suddenly he banked to the left and started up a side creek, and observing all this—I happened to be sitting in the copilot's seat. He asked me if I wanted to sit up front and I said certainly. I'd never been able to do that. All of these horror stories about this lumberman and this crash and the false canyon and the misjudgment of the pilot came back in a rush to both of us, the two smokejumpers, and we watched as the head of this canyon came closer and closer and the pines and the firs were off the wingtips. He was singing happily with his beer can in his hand, and I thought, well, this is all she wrote. Of course, it didn't happen that way. As soon as we hit the head of that canyon, the updraft flipped us up about 800 feet in a matter of seconds and we sailed over the top and went back to McCall. But again, it was an attention grabber.

GP: I suspect it was.

TS: And I wouldn't be at all surprised if he did it intentionally. Some of those Johnson Air Service pilots had that kind of sense of humor.

GP: Now you speak about the Travel Air. Most of your jumps made out of a Travel Air?

TS: I jumped—all of the training jumps, of course, were Ford Trimotors.

GP: Of course, yes.

TS: I jumped out of the Travel Air six times, and out of the Noorduyn Norseman once.

GP: What is a Noorduyn Norseman?

TS: Noorduyn Norseman was a single-engine airplane. Aluminum, not corrugated as the Trimotor was. Slick aluminum panels. Single engine. Very powerful airplane, I remember that very clearly. The surge of takeoff was much more impressive than the Travel Air. I believe that that Noorduyn Norseman was stationed—although this is only vague now, vague recollection—I believe it either came from Coeur d'Alene...What was that CPS camp up in the panhandle?

GP: There was one. I've forgotten the name. Yes.

TS: It either came from Coeur d'Alene or up Spokane way. I believe it was stationed up there. But for some reason, it was in McCall. I did make—and several others—did make one. It carried four jumpers, as I recall.

GP: Travel Air was limited pretty much to two, wasn't it?

TS: On occasion it did carry three. You're right, I always jumped with two, but I do recall reading that it did occasionally carry three.

GP: Did you ever go out on a patrol with the Travel Air, hunting for smokes?

TS: No, never did.

GP: Never did. I did once. That was quite an experience. Travelling around, trying to hunt for smokes. We finally found one, by the way, but it was in Indian Country, and I think the Indian people were very mad because they had pay the Forest Service something for our services, going in there to knock down their fire. Have we missed something about your jumping experience, or the firefighting experience that we ought to talk about?

TS: No, I think the key fires and the training we've covered pretty well. I had a lot of fire experience before I came to smokejumpers.

GP: Oh, now tell me about that. That's something...very wide range. Because some of the men in CPS had a lot of experience fighting fires before coming to smokejumpers, and quite a few had none at all.

TS: We had, in Coleville, and in Reno, Galena Creek in Reno, we were on constant standby in the summer. I dare say I was called out from December of '43 until April of '45, I probably went out on a dozen fires or more. Several of them, again, quite large fires. Up in that brush country north of Reno, between Reno and Pyramid Lake, there's a lot of pinyon pine up there. They're really more brush and grass fires than they are timber fires.

GP: How about sagebrush? You fight fires in sagebrush.

TS: Sagebrush burns like nothing—

GP: Doesn't it though? Can whoosh in a holler, just bang through there. I can still see it racing through the sagebrush.

TS: Well I live, interestingly enough, just outside Reno. Have for over 30 years now. I guess CPS brought me home, if nothing else. I live near Dog Valley, three miles from Dog Valley, at the edge of Toiyabe National Forest, and have for 18 years. So we are quite concerned to this day about fires. We're in timber country, big Jeffrey pines all around our house, and some sagebrush. So fire is a constant concern where we live.

GP: I remember Dog Valley very well. Remember the Lincoln Highway, which had the signs posted off, little signs of Lincoln Highway, on the telephone poles. The road, of course, was no

longer used as a main highway, but this is the ancient Lincoln Highway, which I guess went across the country. This little section right near Dog Valley.

TS: Well we live probably, Gregg, we probably live a mile and a half or two miles north of the Lincoln Highway, which became Highway 40, US 40, some years later. But then in about 1960-61, it was replaced by Interstate 80, which runs, of course, across the country. And goes through the city of Reno and over Donner Summit down to Sacramento. There is, as a matter of fact, up on Interstate 80, there is still the concrete bridge abutment which was moved there for scenic overview, which reads Lincoln Highway, cast in concrete. So we know that country quite well.

GP: You must have gotten down to Carson City, of course. I guess that's the smallest of the state capitals, isn't it?

TS: I was stationed in Carson City, at the National Guard Armory, which was an 1870 vintage building. I was stationed in that building for about three months. After I left smokejumpers, I went back to Coleville. I was in Coleville only briefly, perhaps a matter of weeks, and then I was assigned to Carson City, and stayed in that armory until January of '46, when I was assigned to Lyons, New Jersey, a veteran's hospital for mental patients. So I left CPS 37, finally, in January of '46, went to Lyons, New Jersey, until June of '46, and was discharged from there.

GP: Well, that's an interesting thing. You went to the mental hospital. I actually went from CPS 103 to CPS 149, which is Olustee, Florida, about 75 miles from where I am now in Tallahassee. That was a Forest Service experimental station. Tell me a word or two about the mental hospital work. You had to volunteer for this.

TS: Oh, absolutely.

GP: All right, tell me a word about it.

TS: Well, I guess I really was looking, for those almost three years I was in CPS, for as wide a variety of experiences as I could get. I think I had that. I had a lot of manual work in Coleville, I had some intellectual work on the cartographic crew that was making maps from aerial photographs. In fact, my interest in drawing came from the drafting experience that I had there. The smokejumping experience was still a third kind. Working with mental patients was still a final kind. Six months was just about all of that that I could tolerate, though. I worship those people, they're saints, who can work with the handicapped, whether they're mentally handicapped or physically handicapped. My temperament isn't just cut out for that. It was an interesting experience, but a horrifying one. The veterans at Lyons ranged from the Spanish-American War through World War Two. The great bulk of them were from World War One, but it was a pathetic experience. And what was happening in those days, in 1946, the kind of treatment they were getting, was, as nearly as I could judge, so primitive and uncaring that it was a real revelation to me. Shock treatment was widely used, electric shock treatment. And I

used to see those people come back into the day room from shock, and it was just a very, very unhappy time.

GP: Frightening experience. Not a very lovely way in which to wind up your CPS days, was it?

TS: It was a low note. On the day room, we had a World War Two patient named Raymond, I'll never forget Raymond. And as Memorial Day approached, of '46, he somehow got the delusion that one of the other patients, who was bald headed and rather pink of complexion, was Dwight D. Eisenhower. He had apparently been stationed in Europe, sometime earlier, during the war, and he began raging, several weeks before Memorial Day, that he was going to get Ike. He was going to get Ike on Memorial Day. Well, we tried to reason with him, which was always a lost cause in a place like this. The doctors and the nurses said, well, oh no, no, he'll get over it. Well, one day he did physically attack poor Ike. Didn't batter him badly, but it was a remarkable experience to see this delusion that his former commander in Europe was so bitterly hated by him. He could have well killed him, because Raymond was a big, strong husky man, and the so-called Ike was probably a World War One veteran. He was rather frail and not able to defend himself at all.

GP: Were you in the group that pulled them apart?

TS: Yeah, oh yes. I was there the day he blew up. And of course, they hauled him out of this ward immediately, and put him on the acute ward, where he was manacled and cuffed and put into a wire porch. It was very sad. But surprisingly enough, just weeks before I left, he subsided. They brought him back to the day room. He had apparently totally forgotten all of this, it had totally been erased from his mind. And Ike was still there, but he never paid another bit of attention to him. It was one of those aberrations that's explicable only to God and the person involved, I suppose.

GP: You had a wide variety of experiences during your CPS days, then. Quite a wide variety. More than most of us, I guess, with what I guess was sort of an intellectual challenge and a physical challenge and, oh, at the end a psychological challenge of magnitude that's hard to imagine.

TS: The only thing I regret is I applied also for post-war service in Europe, on some of the cattle boats going to Europe. I can't recall the details now, but there was some kind of a project in the Orient, in China. I remember applying for that. I regretted for many years not being able to go overseas after the war, and to do something there. But that, even that subsequently had an effect for me, because in the mid-'50s, I was a Fulbright exchange teacher, and spent a year and a half in Germany, visiting and teaching in a German gymnasium. And then from there I went down to Switzerland for a year and a half and taught in an international school in Switzerland, and was able to see a lot of the things ten years after the war that I had missed one year after the war.

GP: By ten years after the war, I suppose, Germany had gone through a lot of the picking up and cleaning up the debris left by American and British bombers. So you were not there at the height of the destruction, but did you still see some of the destruction of World War Two?

TS: Yes, but it was pretty well sanitized by then. Even ten years—I went in 1956—and although there was a great deal of obvious damage from the war, there were whole, not whole blocks. There were scores of hundreds of blocks in Hamburg. I was assigned to a town called Ahrensburg, which is about 20 kilometers northeast of Hamburg. And we spent a lot of time in Hamburg, which was at the time the largest city in West Germany. And there was enormous damage. But even more surprising was the recovery within ten years. The so-called German economic miracle was in full swing at that point, and the Germans were very proud of it, as they should have been. And we were treated just wonderfully. In fact, last year we had a German visiting student from that town stay with us. It was part of an effort on our part to repay, 30 years ago, the kindnesses that the German people showed to us.

GP: The American bombers, I think, took Hamburg as one of their principal targets.

TS: Yes, the firestorms wiped out greater portions of—in fact, of the old quarters in Hamburg, there's probably no more than one percent left, of what existed before the war. They've preserved part of it, from Michaelis Kirche [St. Michael's Church], which is down in the center of Hamburg, you can go to the tower and look down on the only old part of Hamburg that still exists. It was pretty well destroyed by the bombing and the firestorms.

GP: Did you love Switzerland?

TS: Well, I'm a skier. Skiing's been one of my strong interests for many, many years, and...we were back in Europe two years ago, as a matter of fact, and visited a lot of these old places. Yes, I like Switzerland. Switzerland's a little bit too orderly for me. The Swiss are a little bit too smug for my taste, and too self-satisfied, but it's a beautiful country and yes, the Swiss are admirable people.

GP: Did you have any chance to ski during CPS days?

TS: I learned to ski in CPS. That's another thing that the war and CPS did for me. It gave me a place to live, Reno, Nevada, it taught me to love skiing, it taught me one of my professions, which is drawing and artwork. Yes, I did learn to ski there. In my album of CPS I have a number of pictures of myself and some friends skiing on seven-foot-long skis with no steel edges. CPS did a lot of good things for me.

GP: There was no real change in your vocational ambition, or vocational objective as a result of CPS, however, was there?

TS: Well, when I went into CPS I was only, let's see, '43, I was 19. I didn't really have any strong vocational...I had had one semester of college.

GP: Where?

TS: University of Redlands, in Southern California.

GP: I know that one.

TS: It's a Baptist school. I hadn't really decided at that point what I wanted to do. I suppose after CPS I went back to school to find out what I wanted to do. And it wasn't really until my junior year, probably beginning senior year, that I decided to go into teaching.

GP: Still Redlands?

TS: I went back to Redlands for one year after the war. And then, because it was rather expensive as a private school, and my mother was living in Santa Barbara, I transferred to UC Santa Barbara, where I could attend more economically, and completed my BA there, and then went up to Berkeley for a year and a half, and studied there from '50 through '51. Then I was a high school teacher for a number of years. I worked for the Nevada Department of Education for a number of years, as a consultant in humanities. I've taught at the University of Nevada Reno for several years. So primarily I was in education, but I've had an art inclination—I minored in art. I've had an art inclination for many years. For more than 20 years, I've had as a secondary line, a small business of graphic arts, and now that I'm out of education, I'm doing that full time. And again, I think that came from my days on the mapping crew in Reno, as a draftsman and cartographer. I learned to use pens, I learned to design, and that's another offshoot of what CPS did for me.

GP: It sounds to me as though your total evaluation of the CPS experience, including but not limited to the smokejumper experience, was really quite an education for you.

TS: It really was. I hated it at the time.

GP: Why?

TS: It seemed like it would never end.

GP: It interrupted your life—

TS: It had been interrupted, sure. And there were things that were distasteful; it wasn't all enjoyment and pleasure and surprises. Some of the labor was very onerous. On the other hand, I never had...I was talking to a colleague yesterday. I asked him if he had ever had a bad experience with any supervisor, Forest Service or mental hospital or otherwise, and I never had

one. I never felt that I was being looked down upon or being dealt a short hand because I was a CO during service. In fact, I felt very little of it after the war. I've never made a secret of it, over the years, that I was a CO. In fact I have spoken of it quite proudly, and I don't feel it's ever handicapped me in employment or personal relationships, with my in-laws. And I know that not all of us can say that.

GP: I know that's true.

TS: I think my circumstances have been quite fortunate, quite fortunate.

GP: You have been lucky, then, really. And your experience with the smokejumpers was one of—perhaps one of the high spots of your whole CPS career?

TS: I don't know. I don't think I would put it any higher than the mental hospital experience. They're totally different kinds of experiences. I suppose I came to smokejumpers primarily because I felt I had to demonstrate physical courage. We weren't able to do it very often in CPS, and the war was going on and people were dying and coming home without legs, and I suppose that part of it was to say to myself, well, I'll get a red badge of courage one way or the other here. And this is the only way I can do it, under these circumstances. So I suppose it was a young man's need to prove himself, and his physical courage. But no, it was a wonderful experience, but I don't think it was any more meaningful to me than the years at Coleville or the six months at the mental hospital. I'd put them all about on an equal part in the impact they've had on me over the last 40 years. Each was important. I've never had the desire to parachute again.

GP: No. Some men have.

TS: I've never had the desire to go up in an airplane again.

GP: Really?

TS: I've never wanted to learn to fly. Airplanes really kind of bore me, actually. I admire them in the air, I admire them for what they can do, I admire them as servants to get us from point A to point B, but really the romance of airplanes is pretty much passed me by.

GP: Not for all the men from CPS. There's some, of course, have gone and done quite a few jumps after this. One would even do a free-fall jump, because they had never done that in CPS, always static line.

TS: Now that's something I regret. I do wish that I'd been able to do that.

GP: One freefall jump would do it for you.

TS: Well, maybe more. I wish I had done that.

GP: Anyway, thanks very much. Nothing we've omitted that you'd like to say?

TS: No, I think those are the high points.

GP: Then thanks very much for the interview.

[End of Interview]