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**Oral History Number: 133-015**

**Interviewee: Ed Case**

**Interviewer: Sandra Carroll**

**Date of Interview: July 21, 1984**

**Project: Smokejumpers 1984 Reunion Oral History Project**

Sandra Carroll: This is Sandra Carroll interviewing Ed Case who was a smokejumper in '46, '47 and '48 at McCall.

Ed Case: Before I jumped?

SC: Yeah, did you, were you—?

EC: I worked in '40, let's see, '44 summer as a fire guard at Cole Meadows, and I was in the primitive area out of McCall in the Payette National Forest. We worked on the airport and a few poles and fought fire. We went to the Sheep Creek, the Sheep Creek fire, I don't remember the name of the fire. We walked to Chamberlain Basin and then with Glenn Thompson, who was fire chief on the forest at that time. Met him at the fire, there were two jumpers that come in then, or the quaker kids, the conscientious objectors. They were on that fire, but the fire blew up on them. One of them wound up way down over on the, it was on the Salmon River breaks and it was out of Chamberlain.

SC: This is 1944?

EC: This is '44. I remember the first I knew the jumpers was those two. One of them missed a mountain and went clear down into the canyon on the other side. But they'd been there for a while. I don't know how long we—we were there 2 or 3 days and cleaned the fire up and then walked out to Chamberlain, walked back to Cole Meadows and Chamberlain which was quite a little ways. I don't remember how far. It was a 2-day walk and that was about the, that was the only fire I'd been on I guess before. That's what got me a job as a smokejumper, because Glenn Thompson was fire chief, and he was I guess suitably impressed. If we could walk that far and still fight fire we could, I could it later. I went, the next year I was in the Navy and the war got over and I wound up, applied for a job at McCall and got it. That would have been '46, summer of '45 I was in the Navy and I was an aviation cadet before that. We went back to McCall; we trained in Missoula and came up here. We were the first bunch of jumpers after World War II and we were the—we were the first bunch of McCall people trained. We were the first ones on the line in McCall.

SC: How many of there were you?

EC: I think there were 20 in the first group.

SC: Do you remember any of the names of those?

EC: Oh yeah, two of them are right here ready to go. I've got a whole list of them. They were—I filled this thing out.

SC: Okay, that's fine, then if we have it someone can—

EC: They were all, we're all veterans, most of them are ex-paratroopers. One of them that was here was an ex-navy pilot that was Ace Nielson. He was the only ex-officer in that bunch and took quite a beating for that. We got back, in, I got some dates and I've got a diary here. I think I've got the diary, I'm not sure, maybe the diaries are in the camper. But we got back in May or June, early June and had a—I went on a fire in June, and the first fire we went on was with the paratroopers who had never fought fire and it was very interesting. I didn't realize the work was quite that hard. [laughs] Then on July 4, we had a, a jumper was hit with a, a guy by the name of Les was in and he, top came out of a tree at night. Hennessey and Paul Wilde were there, and they were falling snag that was burning in the top. And the top came down and hit this—hit Les, and I don't remember his last name, in the head and we jumped in rescue the next day. John Fergusson and Kenny Roth was in that bunch and I was one of them. I don't remember all of them. One of the fellows was an ex-corpsman and give him plasma and we carried him out and he died the next day. That was before the guys had even got, the second group got back from Missoula. I guess other high points that year, that was the busiest year, I made 17 fire jumps.

SC: Do you remember this fire where you did the rescue? You know the name of that fire?

EC: I don't know, no. I know it was the third or fourth of July in '46. I made a jump on the James Creek fire and had a streamer. The main chute didn't open and I broke the emergency and got, that was the first time that had happened.

SC: What'd that feel like?

EC: That was pretty, pretty, well it wasn't so exciting when it happened because they done a good job of training us in Missoula. And what they told you was that if it strings out like that to—not to break your chest pack until you were sure you couldn't shake it out, to see if it would up and I didn't really work too hard on the chest pack until—we were on the thing until everything went just like it was supposed to until I finally decided well, the little chute, I'm gonna have to open it because if the, tangles with the big chute, just the way it's gonna be. And so I pulled it and said a lot and decided I'd settle for a broken leg or something and pulled it and it popped, the thing popped open. Then I hit in a pile of brush just about, not very damn long after. Didn't hurt me a bit and I still got the ripcord from the jump. I've got some neat pictures in here, I never even thought about them until this came up. There's the cord from the emergency. I dropped it but I found it on the ground, that was the 24th of August in 1946.

SC: You might want to show. go back upstairs, Dale who's the archivist just might, might want to take a look at some of your pictures, if you don't mind.

EC: Okay, I've got quite a, I've got some interesting ones. That was, first jumps were out here in Nine Mile weren't, oh I expect after the fourth, I had—the guys may tell you, I was probably considered the luckiest guy in the whole bunch because two or three things happened at Missoula. On the fourth jump, and I really wasn't that organized, one of the guys walked across my canopy and fell down through, this was Bruce Froman, and fell down through the shroud lines. We were both hanging, right here, you know looking at each other, talking to each other and you were supposed to take, you had a knife on your chest pack that you were supposed to take out and cut the lines that you looped around. And he'd looped around three and I started to do that and he says no don't, wait a minute. He was, I knew he was an ex-parachute rigger, so wait a minute, see if I can swing out of here and we swung back and forth two or three times and swung clear.

SC: This was on a training jump?

EC: That was a training jump, my fourth jump.

SC: Did you, I mean were both of you pretty calm about it?

EC: Yeah, it's, it wasn't—we had been told what to do and of course he was pretty confident because he jumped quite a bit before. And I think they did a good job of explaining to us what we were doing, and we were prepared to do these things that when they happened. It didn't, I didn't know enough to know it was really unusual. [laughs] Of course the old war stories from all these ex-paratroopers, why, you know they, there was problems. Guys walking on top of each other's chutes and their chutes weren't steerable. They just jumped a low level and, and they had to jump and so on. So I guess I really didn't think it was that much of a big deal.

SC: Why did you, you said you were, you worked for the Forest Service and you saw some jumpers, some smokejumpers in '44 and you got, did you get interested or did you just get picked?

EC: No, I got—I was interested and it was pretty, see I was right at the end, tail end of World War II. I wanted to be a carrier pilot. I got to be, I just got started as an aviation cadet and the war got over. So you know, things just didn't go the way, it was all glamour and flash and you're young and eager. So I think that had the appeal of it. Just pretty spectacular and pretty impressive to the girls and that sort of stuff you know. I did like the forest. I thought it was—growing up I camped a lot and so on and so on. The summer in Big or Cole Meadows was a lot of fun, had a lot of fun there so. It's hard work, but you got out of the hot valley.

SC: So you were looking for the same kind of excitement and flash that you, you thought, as a navy pilot would be?

EC: Yeah, yeah.

SC: And since that didn't work out, you thought smokejumping would fill the bill for you?

EC: Well, I was, and it was a job. It was a way to earn your way through school. I was going to college and that was, it paid really quite well.

SC: So the three seasons that you jumped you were, that was your summer job for school to help you with school. And what were you doing in school?

EC: Engineering, I was a mechanical engineer at Oregon State and so when I got through school I quit smokejumping and went to earn an honest living, I guess.

SC: Well, were most of the men who you were in your group in McCall that time, were a lot of them fresh out of the armed forces?

EC: All of them were, everybody was.

SC: How many were experienced with forestry stuff before?

EC: Only two or three. Wilde lived in McCall and had grown up around it. There was Paul and Ralph Wilde and I think they, and Larry Henderson was a son of a ranger. I think, I don't think any of the others had ever seen a fire or ever been in the woods. I know some of them, the big tough paratroopers got scared of the dark. We walked up a hill one time when there had been a, he was a medic. But we jumped some deer, and we had these head lamps on and we could see all these eyes over there running around and this guy really got a little bit you know, got concerned. [laughs] But you know, deer at night and big eyes, they really reflect a lot of light.

But, and I think the Forest Service moved away from—after that, the next two groups were mostly college students. They were, they had to be veterans, I think. But they were most of them in college. Because the smokejumper or the paratroopers were, oh god, they were a tough bunch. And you know, there was local fights and basically trouble and we had, had them here, well we bailed one out of jail here in Missoula while we were training, or John Fergusen did. The local law in McCall got to know several of them pretty well. [laughs] And couple of them had drinking problems and that didn't help. They were just a little wild for the nice, settled Forest Service, I think, to handle.

SC: Oh. Do you think that they were in the same position you were, that they were looking for that same kind of excitement and stuff?

EC: Oh, I think a lot of them had had plenty. One, well I know, one guy had jumped on Corregidor, that was Hennessey. One had, this fellow that was afraid of the deer had jumped at D-day and was taken prisoner. Most of the guys were 101st or 82nd Airborne and, and I think all of them had had combat tours, I'm sure almost all of them had had combat time. Ralph

Wilde I know had, that was in the infantry and he'd been run around by German tanks, according to him anyway. So they had some real war stories and of course I was the youngest kid in the bunch and they laid it on me a little heavy, you know. It was...it was a very, very exciting and interesting time. I really, the next, the second year we got a lot of new guys in. The first year was the spectacular year and the third year I had, I was in ROTC, went back to school and I had a midshipmen crew so I had only jumped the—about the last month, month and a half of the season. I got back up late, but the thing is I've known these, these guys were friends then and they're just as good now you know. Some of them I haven't seen for 30 years, over 30 years.

There was—let's see, there was only two that I knew had jumped, myself and another fellow and another one may have later, I don't remember. And there were, also people we played football against in high school Les Bertram had played opposite me on the Boise High School. I played guard and he played tackle. Lloyd Davidson who was from Boise, I was in the Navy with. He was in the, he was at Butte with me in the Navy. It was kind of small world you know, it's a different, it was different, not as many people and at that time all the older men or the guys that were 20, 21 were all in the service. So we were the kids that just ran wild a little bit too.

SC: Why do you think people like yourself chose to jump out of a plane?

EC: Oh, I don't think that the jumping...I don't really know really why I didn't it. I wasn't afraid of it at all.

SC: Do you remember your first jump?

EC: Oh yeah.

SC: Do you remember what you felt like your first time.

EC: I remember it got very quiet you know when you get out of that old Ford Trimotor and it got quiet and it was—things moved pretty fast and when the canopy got open you know, you didn't, I didn't really know, have any concept of what it would feel like. You were just out there and you saw, the plane went, left you real fast and you, it got real quiet, real quick and then your chute, you'd hear a pop and your chute was open. You got a good jolt and then there you were, you just become [inaudible] and you pull down on the lines to turn and look around. It was pretty, you're really detached from everything when you're up that high and the only time that I really got a little nervous, really nervous was about the time you got about tree top height and you got feeling of height. I don't climb mountains, I'm not one of these guys that climbs mountains or that sort of thing and I'm not particularly comfortable at, on high. I worked on high towers or something like that, not very particularly comfortable with it. When you get to about that level, I got, you know, I could realize this was real and that was the real ground down there and the trees were coming up and so on. But I don't, I remember that fourth jump very much. The first jump I don't really remember anything other than getting quite and I don't

remember being particularly nervous going out. I think probably that if I, I didn't dare show it if I would have been because I had all these, these paratroopers that were really laying it on.

SC: Do you remember your first fire jump?

EC: Yeah, that was the one in May that I slid out of a tree. They told me that when you land you didn't have to worry about when you hit a tree. That you didn't have to worry about when you came to a stop because you know, you had to make a let-down.

SC: Do you know what fire this was, do you remember what fire that was?

EC: No, I don't.

SC: Oh, that's all right, just curious.

EC: It was, it'd have been in, in June of '46 and been late June probably. I wasn't due to go back up on the list, see you had a rotating list and I jumped and then this rescue jump came up just a few days after that. But that was my second jump I believe, second operational type jump. But that one I hit in this big blue spruce and just sailed nice and easy into the side of it. They said if you, unless you hit you're all right then you can hook your stuff on your parachute and make a let-down. I got up there and moved a couple times and damned if I didn't slide right off the end of the limb. I just slid down like it was a slide and I slid off the end and got out toward the end and started falling through. I broke free, I went to the ground then and I didn't hit very hard, but I did make a few remarks about the guys that said once you hang up you never have to worry about it, you're going to be there falling. But that one, I rarely—I don't think I hung up, I don't think I ever hung up or had to make a let-down. I could always get over the tree and crawl down it or something like that.

We had one guy hung 120 feet, my jumping partner, in the top of a big tree upon the, it was a big fir up on—not the Middle Fork, the east fork in the Middle Fork, the Salmon. And I had to climb up the tree about 30 feet with a pair of climbers and tie my rope on and then he made a let-down to where my rope was because he ran out of rope at that point. He strung his rope down and we could measure and see where his was gonna come to. Then I climbed, took the climbers and tied my rope off so that he could then get down.

SC: Was he all right up there?

EC: Oh yeah, he was just a little bit concerned how the hell he was going to get to the ground. [laughs]

SC: Was he glad to see you?

EC: Well yeah, we were just the two of us. You find each other right away when you get on the

ground. If I remember you go out, I was trying to remember, it seems like we went out one at a time and then one guy got on the ground and then the other guy and I was the first one down. And we had to cut the tree down to get the chute out and we stepped it off, it was 120 feet from where it was hanging. That was a long ways. That was...it was on a kind of a very steep side hill and I could see him, we could talk to each other because I'd go up the hill and talk out to him, but it wasn't any good way to get him down. I think that was Clabaugh, Paul Clabaugh, I believe, if I remember.

SC: Was there any other experiences, like on the fire line once you got down there?

EC: Well, we had, we had the worst fire I was on was Sheep Creek. That was in '46 and we couldn't stop it. It just, we got in there and it just kept going and going. We left McCall, you could see it in McCall on the ground. We got in several times into places that—one time we went through the fire line, we found a spot that wasn't burning very good and went through. But we just couldn't do anything with it. It just kept, you know, just going and going. I don't know how many, we had a lot of crew, jumpers came in from Missoula and we had, Mexicans came in and the crew from McCall. I remember one Mexican was killed on that fire, walked off a cliff in the night.

SC: When you say Mexicans, did they have a group of them?

EC: They were farm labor.

SC: Farm labor, oh they used them on fires?

EC: Oh yeah, we used them a lot.

SC: Oh, I didn't know, did they have an actual crew, or did they just go where they wanted them?

EC: No, they were, they had farm labor camps in, down in the valley. McCall had one and I don't know where they all came from. They were Mexican nationals. Most of them couldn't speak, well there was usually one interpreter in with the bunch. Some of them had never been in the mountains and they was a real circus to watch them. They'd try to cut a tree. They'd take the axe, and there wouldn't be any angle. They'd just go right straight at it. They were, you know, they were a hazard to themselves with some of these tools and so on. But they were pretty good workers, and they were very good about, they'd work if you worked, but they wouldn't work unless you worked. We had a couple of the Forest Service people that were leading some of the ground crew, and they'd lead the Mexicans and Mexicans are pretty good. They didn't have to have the food; they'd give them bread and canned tomatoes as I remember. They'd sleep right on the ground with their, they'd have their blankets, and they would drop sleeping bags, but they wouldn't usually use them. They were pretty easy. They were, oh, they would bring them in in trucks and hike them in.

SC: Was this when there were particularly badfires that they would bring them in for support groups?

EC: Yeah, well you had to have help. They got everybody you could imagine. They got prisoners out of, they had prisoners out of the state prison that were of the—

SC: Like trustees?

EC: Trustees, I never worked with any of them but they, I know they had the crew.

SC: But they had, but they would use prisoners too?

EC: Yeah. Anybody they could get because there's a lot of manual labor involved in a big fire. I don't know how big Sheep Creek was, but I think we were on it at least a week. And we got it under control I think by that time and we got off it. It burned, I got a, some clippings on there, it burned a lot of ground. That was the most dangerous part of it, really, it was a lot more danger in fighting fires than there was jumping. Most of the injuries, we have leg and ankle injuries and almost always the guys that got hurt were the first year cadets.

This guy that was, well maybe you won't hear about it. His name was—I don't remember. He got a line around and damn near got hung one time. I wasn't there but they had to get him down. But the, you get a fire going and stuff rolling, and the timber will burn and then rocks will come lose or logs will fall and they'll roll down the hill. And if you're down the hill in front of them, that's kind of bad news. Then it can flare up and burn you up too. And it has, I guess. We never had anybody, we had a few guys with blisters and burns or something but nothing very serious.

SC: When you were out for week on this fire at Sheep Creek, were you working with ground crews?

EC: They came in later, yeah. We were the first ones out there.

SC: You were there a week before they even got there?

EC: No, no. We were there probably a day or 2 days before they could get to the fire. Then when they get to the fire, they're, you know, they've been climbing up mountains for the whole day and they're not worth much. And after about the fourth or fifth day we get the fire where it wasn't just running. Why we were, do things like set up the kitchen. They would drop in these kitchens and the food and we'd sort this all out and get it organized until we knew how things went together. But the people were just pulled in off the street or Mexicans and so on, you know, somebody had to see that they were fed.

SC: So everybody, when you were out on a fire, whether you were a smokejumper or a ground crew or the Mexican farm labor or the prisoners, you were all communal, like the kitchen was communal?

EC: Oh yeah. It wasn't, I guess we were thought more of. They didn't leave us on a fire too long when they got heavy ground crew on. Because they needed us other places. But usually when we got, the ground crew got in there and if we could avoid mop-up work, we would, in any way shape or form. [laughs] We got caught with it sometimes but it's hot, hard dirty work and we'd get, once in a while we had an eager beaver boy scout type around one fire that kept giving us weather, getting us up and giving us weather reports in the middle of the night. Wanted to give him the club. He'd obviously never been on a fire and he was, I don't know, worked at one of the ranger stations, assistant ranger out of Southern California or something.

SC: So what was it like afterwards, after you'd been out there and you put all this energy and stuff into this fire, what was it like when you were all done?

EC: Well the hardest, some of the hardest stuff was packing out. We used to have carry our stuff out. There was no helicopters and sometimes you'd get horses and pack strings and sometimes you wouldn't. If you had to carry all your stuff it was pretty brutal load. It was about 70 pounds and usually you'd try to work it out. They'd try to get a pack string into you. And if, oh you'd, I don't think you really got tired or felt that bad, you know. You'd sleep and—I don't remember. I remember being very, very tired coming out but primarily from carrying the pack, especially if we had to carry a pack. I remember at least once that we finally set them down and walked we were about 200 yards from the road and we couldn't get the packs off the road that night. So it was all I could do just to get that thing that far and then pile them along the hill and then run on into camp, then come on down the next day.

SC: So then when you weren't on the fires, what kind of projects were you doing in McCall?

EC: Oh, mowed the lawn and the good projects where we get trail work or telephone line work. Those were usually early in the season when there wasn't any fire. But when the fires, when they were on close call, call, they gave you all kinds of dirty duty jobs around. Take care of the garbage and clean the—just general. Some of it was pretty, you know, you just didn't like to doat all. A lot of it wasn't bad, but we did build the upper barracks and moved CCC buildings in from out in the, out in the forest and built the upper barracks at McCall. That was the kitchen and where the second group of guys stayed. That was fun. Then we built the toilet, I was kidding Dale Catlin last night about he taught me how to build septic tanks.

SC: So you didn't, like in '47, you were still doing it in '48, were those big fire seasons down there?

EC: '46 was the worst, '47 and '48, I made 17 jumps the first year on fires and I didn't make half that many I'm sure the second. The third was, I wasn't there the full season. I was there just

about the lower, the last half of it. There was, we had fires every year and we didn't have a very big crew. But I understand the crews are a lot bigger now and we only had, we had, I think it was 40 jumpers. I'm not sure of this and I think they took ten of them to Idaho City, Smokie Stover took them to Idaho City. Ten or maybe fifteen and then the balance were up there. But you just rotated on the jump list. When you came in your name went on the bottom of the list and you went to the top and depending on the size of the fire and how many they were taking out were—how fast you got to the top. And you had eight men, if you were taking a load you know, they'd clean the whole place out. On the Sheep Creek fire everybody went. But the two-man fires were more fun.

SC: Oh yeah, why's that?

EC: Well you're out there it's like a big camping trip. [laughs] Wally Henderson and I were up on the Seven Devils, that was the second or third year and they dropped us in on top in September, it was early September. The last, probably the last fire of the year and the fire wasn't big enough to worry about. It would have gone out by itself. It was about, a good size campfire when we got on it, in some brush and you know, there wasn't anything to putting it out. But then we were way hell and gone up back of Riggins on top of a hill and it was cold and the packer was supposed to come get us. We weren't supposed to walk out because the packer was gonna come out of Riggins and get us.

So we stayed, spent 2 or 3 days, I think it was 3 days up there and you spent all day in your sleeping bag because it was so damn cold, you know, to—and finally decided, we run out of food and we got hungry and so we decided to walk out. We walked, and we left our gear there. We were up too high to pack our gear out and we left our gear there. First, we'd built great huge smudge you know, big fires. We thought maybe the packer couldn't find us and they'd spot us or they'd jump somebody else in on it or they'd look see what the hell was going on. Well, they saw the smudge, but the packer couldn't get into us because of the way the cliffs were arranged.

So we walked down, we had, I don't know, we were hungry, very hungry and I remember coming into a top of a canyon where there'd been an old farm house and there was an apple tree. And Wally went up the apple tree looking for, we were looking for apples and kicked a little brown bear out of it, little cub come roaring down the tree and took off. But we ate some, oh kind of half rotten apples and walked back down the hill along a creek and ran into some fisherman and they asked us if we'd like some breakfast and we didn't, I don't know why we didn't take it. [laughs] But I guess we just didn't feel comfortable about it. We got back out and then Wally took the packer back up and got our gear. But the two-man fires were a lot of times, two-man fires were easy. They were just a smoke, and they were easy to put out and you were just on a camping expedition. Once in a while they'd get too big to handle, or they'd take four or six men. I've been on, most of them are kind of fun, except sometimes you got a lot of exercise going in and out, especially out.

SC: Was that the hardest part, going out, sometimes?

EC: Well, I think, I remember that, when you're fighting fire and it's going, you know, it's moving, it's exciting. You've got adrenaline flowing, I'm sure of that and you don't get, I don't notice being, didn't notice being tired then and we'd work some, oh 12, 14 hours sometimes. You get them at night lots of times. Like you get them in the evening, and you couldn't handle them in the day, you'd catch them when it got dark, getting dark and cooling off and you could get them. And if you get them surrounded and you can hold them, why, you about had it whipped. Usually if you got so some wasn't going to come across the line or the wind didn't come up real bad on you. Probably the hardest fires were the big ones. The bigger they were, the harder work it was fighting the fire and the smaller ones, the work was, I guess coming out.

SC: And so when you were back at your base and you didn't have projects, what did you do with your free time, like your evenings?

EC: I shouldn't tell you, [laughter]. Well remember who this group was and there was some pretty riotous behavior and pretty much chasing of the local girls and—

SC: So you'd go into town is what you're saying.

EC: Yeah, well in McCall we were right in town. McCall was a summer resort for the whole valley around us. So all the, all the good looking girls in the country came up there to their cabins or they were up there for vacation and so on. So there was that and then there were a lot of local girls. I guess it was girls and, and partying is pretty well what took our time. There weren't many chess players. [laughs] And really you didn't have all that much, the first year—there wasn't a lot of time, you know. You had time off in the evening why—I don't think we went into town as much as it seems like now. But we can remember, we remember those times.

SC: Well, when you were in the school during the off-season, what did your friends think about you being a smokejumper in the summer?

EC: Well, it was, you know, big deal. Big deal or a little crazy, you know. My wife was impressed at the time. She wrote a, did a psychology paper on the smokejumpers. She did one, she interviewed them, she didn't interview them, she sent them questionnaires. She knew two or three of them.

SC: She was in school when this was—

EC: Yeah, she was in school at Oregon State, and she sent out questionnaires and got answers back from about everybody in the, I don't remember what they were. But I was asking her when we came up here if she still had that thing and she may have it, she says it may be in Oregon with her stuff.

SC: That would be real interesting.

EC: Kind of an interesting thing that, get another view.

SC: Well if she could find that, I'm sure the archives would be really interested in a copy of it.

EC: We hadn't even thought about it until we got talking about these guys coming up. We were driving up and I asked her, you know, I brought this stuff and I said geez, what happened to that thing you did?

SC: Do you know what year she did that?

EC: It must have been probably the summer of '48, probably.

SC: And she got a real good response I mean she sent out these.

EC: Yeah, well, yeah, she sent them to the, well they were guys that I jumped with. They all knew me. Now I don't know, don't remember, there weren't very many of us you see and I think she, I was asking her, I think she got about 89 percent of them back. She got a real good response.

SC: I think that would be real interesting, yeah.

EC: And I don't remember, I remember her working on this paper, I don't, I'm sure the paper was written, I know she wrote it. It wasn't a scholarly type thing, she was an undergraduate at the time, a sophomore.

SC: Doesn't matter, it'd still be interesting.

EC: Yeah, and it had to be '48. It would have had to been somewhere or '47 or '48 year probably.

SC: What was it that impressed her about smokejumping? Do you remember?

EC: Oh, she thought they were all crazy, you know, she, I don't know, I really don't, I couldn't tell you what impressed her.

SC: Did she worry about it?

EC: I don't think so.

SC: Did you, did your male colleagues feel, do you think they felt envious of you for what you

did in the summer?

EC: Yeah, yeah I think so. It was such a neat way to spend the summer, really, you know. Even if you work for the Forest Service or some place like this, it was really a good way to spend the summer. A lot of those guys, you know, they'd work in the fields or they'd wash cars or something like that you know. No, it, that was, there was no doubt that that was a prime job.

[Break in audio]

SC: What did your family think of you?

EC: Not very much. My mother was appalled at it. Of course, when I went into the Navy to be a pilot, that didn't, set her up. Then when I, when they had this, I'll have to show you this clipping, when I jumped on James Creek. They wrote a real neat article in the paper, if I can find the silly thing. But anyway, I was missing, that's all that was in the paper and my mother and my father had separated. There it is, and they were all over the Forest Service, you know, where in the hell, going on, you know. [laughs] Well, you and that was, it hit the statesman, I guess. After I got back and on another fire or two and so that wasn't what really, you know. But I was doing it so she went along with it.

SC: She think there was better ways for you to spend your summer?

EC: Yeah, but she didn't have any good suggestions so and I was putting myself pretty much through school that way and that, between that and my G.I. Bill, I figured I did.

SC: Would they, would the Forest Service allow you so that your time would be, so you could get back to school on time and get out of school?

EC: Yeah.

SC: Were they real lenient about giving you the time to do that?

EC: Yeah, there was a whole bunch of us that did that and September the fire season is pretty well over and you could leave. They arranged when you come on, right after school, they'd tell you what week to report and then it was all set up for—no problem at all, never had a bit of trouble with that. A lot of the guys I worked with, that first bunch, most of them didn't go to school. A lot of them wanted to stay on in the winter and they only took a few of them. Didn't have enough work for them, they got your parachutes and did those other sort of things that. Then of course there was always the married men, got the, the ones that were married got to stay on and got the good jobs too. Some of the, although the ones that did stay, were real good people. Wayne Webb and Dale Catlin, Smokie Stover, Peter, I don't think Peterson was married at that time but the other Peterson, in the bunch was married and they made foremen and spotters out of those guys fast.

SC: What about any of the pilots, did you know any of the pilots that flew you?

EC: Flog, Bob Flog flew us most of the time. I knew him, didn't know him real well.

SC: Was he in the service before he flew?

EC: I don't know, I don't think so. I think he was with Johnson here in Missoula.

SC: Oh, the Johnson Brothers?

EC: Yeah. I think he'd been flying the brush type planes, pilot for years. Very careful, very, felt very comfortable with him. They weren't reckless, any of those guys. They were very, you know I seen them say no, we aren't going to fly today, or we're not going in there today. Some of the back country strips they'd only go in and out of them in the morning and then late at night, you know, just about dark. But he's the only one I remember. I even remember we used bug him, we could reach out of the window on the Trimotor and the control cables came back on the outside of the plane, had a big wheel crank and you jerked the cable, and it would bump the rudder or the elevators. He'd be flying along there real peaceful, and we'd reach out and jerk that thing and he'd, then the airplane would lurch and he'd turn around and snarl at you. He'd look for a minute, you know, you'd really wake him up. He'd look for a minute and he'd turn around and snarl at you, [laughs] knock it off back there. Those old planes were something, those Trimotors. I never jumped out of anything, I jumped once out of a DC-3 and the Travel Air was another but, and DC-3s were so hot they, you know, Trimotor's just like walking off a ledge, it's so slow. They were nice and they go in and out of fields, you couldn't get these big planes out.

SC: Which plane do you prefer jumping out?

EC: Trimotor, yeah.

SC: You said earlier in the beginning that you hadn't seen some of these guys in 30 years and you see them now and they feel just like old friends.

EC: Uh huh.

SC: What is it about smokejumping that does that?

EC: Oh, I suspect that there's—a group probably forms like that under any kind of a stress situation, I think. I've seen it in the Navy to a degree. I went back during the Korean thing and the officers the ship got kind of that same sort of a, you live with them and there weren't any real big hazards. But you, you live with them, drink with them, knew their families. You were dependent on it, you were each dependent on each other for doing their job and doing it right

and, and I think that's, that's part of this stuff. I think this is the same sort of deal, because you know, you were pretty dependent on these other guys, lots of times and especially if they were packing your parachute.

SC: Was it, is it trust then?

EC: Yeah, it's trust, it's trust and confidence in the other guys' abilities and I guess that's the same thing. I think it's trust and a certain common purpose or something. You've got the same, you're doing the same thing, you're trying to get the same thing done and some of that makes a difference, I'm not just sure.

SC: Do you think that any of your friendships outside of smokejumpers have the same qualities to them?

EC: Oh yeah, oh yeah, they have the same, they're—I think there's probably a mixture of types of individuals in the smokejumpers that, I'm an engineer and by nature engineers are snobs because they only talk to other engineers. So that's where most of my friends were, or else they're friends of my wife's and then, that's where most of our friends are now. But at that time this was a real cross section of people. It was kids like myself and some young guys, well they were older, they were 24, 25, that had been through a lot of combat and some of them had gone through some pretty tough experiences. Some of them, one guy actual scarred, well he had been a German prisoner for a long time and he would carry, always carry food. Nobody else would carry food but he would always have food and he would always, he'd be nibbling. Not because he was particularly hungry, I think it was a security blanket, his food was. He claimed it was because he just didn't have anything to eat for a long time and you know, we'd kid him about that. But there was a wide variety of backgrounds, education, intelligence, you know some of them were smart. There were some smart kids there were some that weren't all that bright. But they all worked, you know, we were all a team. We all worked together and we all, if there was a big flap in McCall, you know somebody got into a bar and got in trouble, wound up in jail we somehow arranged to take care of him and get him home, that sort of thing.

SC: So you think it's that common goal, that common purpose that made it so easy for you to form these bonds with all these different people. That perhaps if you hadn't been a smokejumper with them, you wouldn't have been friends?

EC: I wouldn't have, I'm sure of that. I'm sure I wouldn't have been. They were not the kind of people that would have sought each other out as friends necessarily, you wouldn't, they wouldn't have probably even, just by nature have been in a position where they would have been exposed to each other. Yeah I suppose there's something in common about all of us, you know, generally speaking. We were silly enough to jump out of airplanes. [laughs]

SC: So is there anything else that you'd like, any other stories or anything else about your whole experience?

EC: No.

SC: It seems to be that you've thought a lot about this. Talking to your wife on the way down here again and talking with your—

EC: Well, filling that form out made me stop and go back and think and do a little backgrounding on when some of these things occurred. You don't remember that sort of stuff. I think that, one thing it did, I've always been really impressed with the Forest Service. The federal government has got a lot of screwed up agencies and the Forest Service has some fringes sometimes that are a little bit screwy, but generally they have such good people and—in Ogden if you go to, you got a map or you go to get a map, if you're 5 minutes until 5:00, you know no problem. They'll fiddle around until 15 after, and this is just the clerical people in the office, you go to Hillfield 20 minutes to quitting time and they won't talk to you. It's an attitude and it's—we have several friends who are friends in Ogden because there's a lot of Forest Service people there and they're just really nice people. One of them is fire control man down there. John Fergusson of course, is my boss is down there. But the Forest Service I think, has done good things. I think it's done a good job as a government agency. Done a good job at getting the right kind of people and a good public—a good public, public image. They've got a lot of dedicated people. I know they stand in line to get the jobs, the good ones, that's maybe the reason.

SC: So how would you summarize your three seasons with the Forest Service?

EC: It was a lot of fun.

SC: Was it?

EC: It was a lot of fun, I enjoyed it. It probably got me over a lot of the frustration I had from not getting, you know, when you're young and you want to go out and do things, why that, I did them, I did a lot of them.

SC: So when you think about it, you think about what a good time you had, you don't think about that hard work?

EC: No, no I don't hardly remember it. I can remember being very, very tired. But I don't remember the hard work. I can remember just the funny things that happened, some of the silly things that we did and there's a, always a continuous ribbing of one guy for this thing or for that thing. Everybody had their, their soft spot I guess, [laughs] but I guess that would be better, I think.

SC: Just had a good time.

EC: I had a good time, I enjoyed it. It was a very memorable part of my life, but it's, you know, I wouldn't make a career of it. It was a good way, was sure a nice way to go through, to, you know, going to school and studying hard for 9 months and then you go back. And this is...as far as this like you know, taking a break for normal recreation and I go play tennis now and get my frustrations out. Beat it out of the ball to death and this was the kind of thing that would give you a break in the summertime, when you were going to school. It really was a break and you were ready to go back when you went back.

SC: So you saw it as a release for stress and tension of being in school all year. A way to work it out was to jump out of airplanes?

EC: Yeah.

SC: Okay, Ed, what do you think about women smokejumpers?

EC: Boy, at that time they couldn't have functioned at all, no way.

SC: Why do you think that?

EC: They'd have never been accepted. The veterans wouldn't have taken them. They would have allowed them on the fire. It wasn't woman's work.

SC: Oh, you think it was just bureaucracy that would have kept them out.

EC: No, it was individual people's opinions. It's like when the first woman tried to go into a coal mine or something. They just wouldn't have them. There's not a place for a lady on the fire, at that time.

SC: Okay. Do you think women would not have been capable of it in 1946?

EC: Oh no, I know, sure they could, I know that. I'm not a, I'm not a, a chauvinist completely. I do have three daughters in Missoula. But I have certain, I had certain tendencies at one time. But no I wouldn't, girls now would have no problem with it. It's pretty physical. They wouldn't have, I didn't know, I've got one of my friends' daughter's a geologist. She goes out with the field crews, she's the only girl out in the mountains, take them out with helicopters and everything else. Her father is a little uneasy about this, but, why, you get over that sort of thing, you've got to live your own life.

[End of Interview]