

This is an interview with Art Flick by Roxanne Farwell for the Smokejumpers Oral History Project, in Missoula, Montana on July 22, 1984. OH# 133-37

RF Are you ready?

AF Right.

RF Okay. Can you tell me how old you are?

AF I'm 54.

RF And where were you born?

AF Syracuse, New York.

RF Okay. When did you come to Missoula area?

AF Well, I first came out here in 1953 when I was accepted in the jumpers, that was the first I'd ever been west.

RF Can you, kind of, outline your background before you became a jumper?

AF Well, I'd gone through high school and always had a desire to go to Westpoint. So I... at the end of my senior year in high school, I went to a preparatory school in New York City. At that time, my Congressman didn't have any appointments for Westpoint, but he had one for Annapolis. So I took a competitive exam for that and got the highest grades on the exam, and was a principle appointment for Annapolis.

[I] ultimately ended up going to the Naval Academy. I was there two years and got hurt and had to drop out of the Academy. Had a head injury. I was playing... I was on the Varsity soccer team. And it was an injury that I was a couple years getting over so I couldn't go back to school until I got over my problems from the injury.

Then I decided on a career in Forestry, so I went to the New York State Ranger School, which was a one year semi-professional level school. When I graduated from there, I went on down to Syracuse and decided to go on to get a full degree in Forestry. And while I was there, I happened to see that movie "Red Skies in Montana". That peaked my curiosity and my interest.

So, there were fifteen of us from our class there at Syracuse, the class of '55, that applied to go to the jumper training school. Out of the fifteen, just two of us were accepted.

I don't know how they picked the two guys because on paper it seemed like we all looked pretty much alike. But I was selected along with a fellow named Hunt Hatch, and we came on out, drove out in my old '50... or '40 Chevrolet that I had. And Hatch liked it out here so well that he never went back to New York, he stayed out here and went to Idaho and got his degree there. So that was how I happened to get out here to start with.

RF Do you remember anything on that application that you filled out?

AF No, the only thing that I thought that might have helped me was my Naval Academy background. That they knew I've been subjected to discipline and would be in good physical condition, and be able to take orders and function well. I was always very physical in high school and in college. You know, played baseball, and soccer, and everything, so that may have helped me, I don't know.

RF What was your image of the smokejumper? Was it pretty much just like the movie you saw or...? [laughs]

AF Well, you know, just... I was always the kind that liked to do new things and liked adventure. It just appealed to that part of my personality, that I thought, I'd like to get out here and see the West and jump out of airplanes and... the fires. Much to my parent's distress.

RF Yeah, I was gonna ask you how they felt about that?

AF Yeah. It was just one of those things that you couldn't explain. [It was] just something I wanted to do, or felt that I had to do it. I was real glad that I did it.

RF So you came out in '53?

AF And I was with the early group that went through. I believe there were eighteen of us, I think, in that early group. I sent all my letters home to my parents and I couldn't believe it when I read them over here about a month ago. According to my letters there were only four, or six, out of that eighteen of us in that group that finished the training. Because of injuries and drop outs, and like that. Some of them went out and completed their training when the second group came in, which was a much larger group.

RF That was being the same season, but just a different group?

AF Yeah, right. We came out in May. They let me out of school early. I took my exams early so I could come out with the early group. And as I say, there were eighteen of us.

Then with that group of eighteen, there were twelve Army Airborne Rangers, ten master sergeants, and two lieutenants, that trained with us and were learning timber jumping techniques. I believe that was the first Army personnel that had ever trained with the jumpers. They were studying our chutes and techniques, and everything. There were eighteen of us and twelve of them, [which] made 30 in the group. So that was... the story on that.

RF Was this at Nine Mile?

AF Yes, that was at Nine Mile. Yeah. That was the last year

we trained at Nine Mile.

RF Can you describe the facilities that you had there?

AF Well, the facilities there were pretty primitive. It was an old CCC camp. I remember going into the little office they had there the day that Hatch and I reported. One of the Army boys had gotten hurt the day before and had his arm in a sling, and another fellow was in there [who] had a cast on his leg. And there were only four people in the building! I [thought], "Gee, here two of them are crippled. What am I getting in to? Already two guys out of four are hurt." So... you know, I was a little apprehensive when I saw that.

But, we slept in barracks... wooden barracks on cots and had a mess hall. I remember one of the things they had us do every morning before breakfast, was go out and work on a woodpile. They had a big woodpile there and we'd have to go out and cut wood every morning. Split wood and do that for an hour before breakfast and that was quite... I [enjoyed]... I cut wood at home so it was nothing new to me. Then we'd have breakfast and then we'd have calisthenics, which, I never understood why they had them right after breakfast. We'd go out and do an hour of calisthenics and then we'd start our training. I don't remember just what took place when. We had courses and everything, and worked on the towers and the mock-ups and all that.

RF About how long did that last?

AF I don't remember how long the training was, I'd have to look at my letters from home. But I'm sure it's documented. However long they normally took to train.

I remember the food there, it was just excellent! It was out of this world. They'd... you could put a quart of milk in front of each person's place every meal. And we had huge steaks and all you wanted to eat. The food was wonderful! It was really great! Never ate any better in my life anyplace, than I ate there.

RF You need it for all that work! Were you ready for that first jump?

AF Well, the first jump was... I think naturally anyone's apprehensive on their first jump. We had all the training in the world, but you should... need to build your confidence. I remember one of things that I wrote home about was that: the morning that we were to make our first jump, we went down to the airstrip and it took off with the Travelaire with two of the instructors. And they went up and parachuted and came down and landed right in the field and that gave us a lot of confidence. We figured, "Oh, gee, I guess they can do it, we can do it." So.... Yeah, that first jump....

I can remember just sitting in the doorway and thinking, "Boy, I want to do it," but I... it just seemed like something inside of you said, "You shouldn't do it." And you were having a fight with yourself and.... But I also figured it was easier to

jump out then turn around and say to the guys, "I can't do it!", you know. So we went out and I was really pleased when I found out I was alive after I got the opening shock! I was pretty excited and.... I always had trouble doing my rolls when I hit the ground. And I remember, I really messed up my first roll.

I was trying to impress Tom Milligan, [W. Thomas Milligan], who was one of them that selected the people who go to Yellowstone. I really wanted to go to Yellowstone with the Park Service because it was... they paid more money down there. You got overtime. I was working my way through college and I needed the money, so I really wanted to get on that Yellowstone crew.

I wanted to do everything just perfect if I could. And I remembered on that first jump, I... I got oscillating and I came in backwards. I was just planning on coming in frontwards and doing the regular over-the-shoulder roll and I had to do a backwards roll. I didn't do it all that... I almost... I kind of stopped and then did the roll after the damage was already done, you know. So.... That was my first jump.

First jump wasn't so bad but on the second jump... I'd gotten to be real good friends with this fellow, Dave Holder [David L. Holder] and they jumped you alphabetically. He and I jumped right together and he landed on a... it was an open area, but there was an ant hill there and he landed with one foot on the ant hill and the other foot hit at a level below that and it... he got a fracture in his back... compound fracture in his back. I remember him laying there and they took him to the hospital. So we went in that night to see him and they had him stretched over a barrel-like arrangement. We'd done these exercises to strengthen up our stomach muscles and our leg muscles, and they had him strapped over this barrel like that, to stretch his muscles so they could get his back into position. They wanted to set it. And I remember he was strapped over this like a drum and he was vomiting. He was just in awful pain. And that... that really scared me.

So when we made our third jump, I remember, there were several of us that were scared. I think... that were real good friends of Dave's because we'd seen what happened to him. I remember gripping the edge of the plane and... I jumped and I made it all right, but the next morning my fingertips were all bruised. Apparently, I gripped the edge of the plane so hard that I bruised the ends of my fingers, and I didn't even realize it, you know. And another one of the boys threw up that morning in his face mask. He was just scared because Dave had gotten hurt and we were nervous, you know.

I remember that, but other than that... once we got over the fourth or fifth jump, then we got some more confidence again and it got to be pretty exciting.

RF How did the instructors treat you when things like that happened? It was obvious you were really nervous...?

AF Well, they just constantly tried to instill confidence. If you had the training.... And that those accidents like that were unavoidable, you just tried to miss things. But once in awhile you were gonna hit a rock or catch a dead stub or something and,

you know. Certainly no reflection on them or the training methods, it was just a natural fear that you'd have if somebody close to you gets hurt. Why, you naturally think more about that than if some stranger gets hurt, you know.

RF Well, you'd been through some military training in Annapolis, how did the training at the Smokejumper [base] at Nine Mile, compare?

AF Well, it wasn't anywhere near as military-oriented. The a... it was much more casual relationship between the instructors. No, there was no comparison, other than the self-discipline that you had to go with. No, there was no... Naval Academy is strictly a military thing and, you know, spit and polish, and this was very casual, you dressed casually and....

RF Did the military people that were with you in the training session...? How'd they react to the Forest Service personnel?

AF Oh, they were real anxious to learn our techniques and just made the transition. They interfaced with us very well and, you know, it was as though they weren't even in the military. The lieutenants didn't order them around, they just were there to observe and they were twelve really super guys. They'd go to town with us on weekends and, you know, and we'd have a few beers.

We had one fellow, one of the master sergeants, his name was Williams. He'd played in Red Foley's band prior to going into the military and he was a real good guitar player, wonderful singer. So every weekend we'd go into town. There was a bar there called the Sunshine Bar. That was kind of our headquarters, and Chuck would always take his guitar and we'd go in there and sing and have a great time. They were a great bunch to be with.

RF Well, what was it that they were trying to learn from you guys?

AF Well, their jumping was primarily in open areas and we were jumping in timber, ultimately, so they were learning timber jumping techniques and what.... The type of equipment they used wasn't really very adaptable to jumping in the kind of situations we did. So they were studying our chutes and how to maneuver them, and all that.

RF Yeah, you had more steerable chutes, I guess, and stuff.

AF We had one chap with us, Chuck Viviano [Charles J. Viviano], who's being interviewed over there with the other girl. And he'll probably tell them the story about the sixth jump, which was our next to the last training jump, and he sprained his ankle on the jump. Really bad! He really tore it up. And he knew if the instructors found out about it that he wouldn't be able to finish the course. He only had to make one more jump, which was the next day. So, when he hurt his foot, I went right over to

him to see how he was. And he said, "Boy, I really messed up my ankle." So we laced his boot up real tight and this other fellow that was with us, and I, got... put our arms around him like we were all good buddies. We were singing, and we got him across the field and got him in the truck and got back. Then we... later we soaked it in a, there was a spring out back of camp and we went out.... I'd played soccer when I was in the Naval Academy so I knew that the best thing to do for an ankle injury, contrary to what my doctor might tell you, was to exercise it.

So we soaked it in this real ice cold spring for quite awhile and then put his boot back on and laced it up tight. Then we went to town that night and had a few beers and went to a dance. He danced on it until the dance hall closed. The next morning... we bought a pint of whiskey, and the next morning we got him all full of booze and got him back on the plane. Nobody knew anything different. He jumped out and made his seventh jump and then he acknowledged to them that his ankle hurt a little bit. But, he had plenty of time for it to heal up so that was....

He and I have been real close friends ever since then. He said if it hadn't been for me, he probably wouldn't have ever gotten through the training. It was kind of funny.

RF You mean that sort of thing happened frequently?

AF No. Well, yeah, there was... you build a real spirit of comradeship up among the jumpers and you try to help each other out, you know. He'd have done the same thing for me and, you know, you just, it was a means to an end. You wanted to get through the training. We wanted him to because we're wanting to jump with him. He's a great guy.

Another thing, he was from the East and I was from the East. We were the only two Eastern boys out here and so we kind of gravitated towards each other because they liked to pick on us because we were Eastern dudes. And it's strange, we both got picked for the Yellowstone crew out of the four guys they picked. Chuck and I both got picked for Yellowstone so we figured we showed them [chuckle] what Eastern boys could do.

RF You say you got picked for Yellowstone. Where else could you've gone if... what other place?

AF Well, Missoula, McCall, or Winthrop, Washington, they sent fellows all over.

RF But now, getting sent to Yellowstone. You work for the Park Service?

AF Yes, worked for the Park Service. And yeah, it was kind of an elite detail because you were just a small group and you jumped all the fires. You didn't have a big waiting list. Like, they were telling us over at the Depot yesterday, they have a big list and they... you jumped and then they... when you come in they put you on the bottom of the list. There [at Yellowstone], there were only four guys and we jumped two at a time. When you came back usually the other guys were out so you were on the top

of the list. And we just come back and go jump.

They had, I think, eighty-one fires that year on the... that Yellowstone and the Madison River country and Teton area, and around, so we were jumping just... I think they probably set some kind of a record for number of jumps that year because it was a real hot year. A lot of fires, a lot of lightning strikes, and so it was a real good detail, real good duty.

RF Of the four of you... then you had a squad leader or something?

AF Tom Milligan. Yeah, in fact, he was supposed to have been here for the thing. Our whole crew was here for the... for the reunion. Yeah. And the pilot, Jerry Wilson, who flew our plane was supposed to be here. He just got a contract to fly helicopters in the Olympics so he couldn't be here. But we were all to be here. Milligan's wife had surgery and he couldn't come. So, we would've had the whole crew here from Yellowstone.

RF Was that about it? The six of you out there?

AF There were six of us with the pilot, squad leader, and four jumpers, yeah.

RF And who was the rigger?

AF I don't remember who rigged those chutes. Whether they sent them back here to get rigged, I don't recall. No, I don't recall. I know we didn't do them because we were all first-year jumpers and we couldn't rig our own chutes. No, I don't remember who rigged them.

We had a couple unusual incidents down there. We had one... I remember there was an inspector coming out from Washington, some "Big Shot". He was gonna come out and fly over and observe us in action and we wanted to impress him for Milligan's sake. And so, they were flying a patrol and they saw the smoke so we circled it. We hadn't see the lightning strike, we just saw the smoke coming up. So Milligan said, "Good, we got a fire and that bird from Washington will be here tomorrow and we can show him a real fire." So we parachuted down to it and got down to it and it wasn't a fire at all. It was one of the geysers in the timbered area that... these things, periodically, would give off these clouds of steam, and it looked just like smoke. We parachuted down to put it out and there wasn't even any fire there. So, we thought, "Gee whiz, what are we going to do? Milligan is going to be back tomorrow with this big shot from Washington and we haven't got any fire to show them." So we said, "Heck, we'll build one." So we put a fire line around an area and cut a bunch of green boughs, and we cut this old snag down and set it on fire and got it burnt so it was burning good. Next morning [when] we heard the plane coming with this inspector and Milligan coming, we torched her and set the thing on fire. And boy, we had a heck of a fire going. [laughs] And we were there busy mopping it up. [Of] course we had the fire line already routed and it was... no way it was going anywhere. And the guy

thought that was really great! He gave Milligan an A+ on the inspection trip. (laughter) So I thought that was kind of... kind of a riot.

AF Yeah. [laughs] Remember the first fire?

RF Yeah, I remember my first fire. Again, I've got that in my diary. I can't tell you any particulars on it. They were... most of the fires we jumped there were just lightning strikes. We'd actually go out and fly patrols and follow the storms. Observe the strikes and then circle them. If... whatever the lightning hit... ignited, then we'd be right there to jump on it. So we did... they gave us permission because they were having so many fires, to cut down on the time lag from when we went out to get back, that we flew patrols almost constantly to observe the... you know... We followed the storms right across Yellowstone as they came through until they got out of our area. So, I think that was a little unusual because usually they waited for a report to come in and then they'd call you.

But lots of times we got on them right now and got them out and got back out to the road. I can remember in Yellowstone, the frustration in getting out on the highway with our fire packs and... or if we stashed our packs, just getting out. And the tourists would have a road jam... blocks there from feeding the bear and doing all this kind of things. And we couldn't get through! You'd blow the siren on the pickup and they just, you know, they just would ignore you. We had terrible times getting back. Especially when we knew there was another fire waiting for us. It was frustrating to try to get back to West Yellowstone to go jump again.

RF Did you have a fire that season that the four of you couldn't handle?

AF Yes, we flew out on two different ones that, when we got there, they were just obviously too big for us. One got away from the whole... the whole bunch of people they sent in there. I think it burned over 1200 acres. They finally brought up a bunch of Indian firefighters from New Mexico on that one, but it was... by the time we got there... all four of us were gonna jump on it, and it just was, you know. We knew we couldn't handle it so we didn't jump. But those were the only two that I remember. Yeah, and then I went out on one... well, it was in August. And on one prior to that, it was a real hot day. And we got a call that there was a smoke observed up on this plateau... and again, I can't remember the name of it, but I've got it in my diary back home. We normally didn't jump in midday because the air was, you know... temperatures were high and air was thin and you came down like a stone.

We were out flying patrol and observed this fire. It was about 2 o'clock in the afternoon and we normally would've just waited till night, but it was in an area where it really could've gotten away in a hurry. So, we thought, "Well, we'll jump." And I remember the plateau was 9500 feet. So we jumped from over 10,000 and we came down just like a stone. I remember I hit the

ground. It just dazed me, it knocked me out. In fact, I can remember this hot searing feeling going right up my rectum like somebody had taken a hot knife and... and, uh... kind of goofy for a few minutes and then I remember coming to and they said they could see the dust when we hit the ground. We hit it so hard, it would just make a cloud of dust. It was so dry. And so... I got this from one of the letters I wrote back home, that the pilot said that he never again would jump any of us that time of the day. He didn't care if the whole forest burned up because he wasn't gonna jeopardize his men for the fire. But we did jump that one in midday and it was... it was a bad one. But we got it out. We really hit the ground awful hard and so....

Then it was the next jump after that one, I got hurt. We were jumping in a meadow and I remember there were a bunch of buffalo in it. We never wanted to jump in a herd of buffalo and so we took the plane and we circled around [and] dove right down at them. I can remember sitting in the door of the plane hollering at the buffalo. I got pictures of them, colored slides of them with their tails up over their backs, just thundering out of the little meadow that they were in. We wanted to chase them away so they wouldn't, you know... if we landed down in the midst of them parachuting, they might go bananas and run over somebody. So we had a little fun rodeoing them out of the field with the airplane.

Then Don Heinicke jumped first and he came short of the jump spot. So we signaled to Milligan to move the jump spot over because there's more ground than we thought and he just barely made it into this little opening. So when they dropped me I'd have been all right, but I had a malfunction in my chute and I free fell about 400 feet. I can remember trying to decide whether I had... could shake it loose or whether I'd have to cut loose and open my ground pack... my chest pack. And I dropped so far that I just was afraid that my chest pack wouldn't open so I kept shaking my lines and trying to get my chute open. It finally popped partially and I had some lines over the top, they call it a line over.

I was falling at a lot faster rate than I [was] supposed to and I came to the edge of that field, where I showed you that picture of my chute hanging in the tree, and I remember seeing those three dead snags there. And they were... each one was a little higher than the other. I got by the first two and I hit that third one. I was oscillating and I just swung and I smashed right into the top of the thing and I hit it, it knocked me unconscious.

It bent my face mask right in against my jaw and tore the sole off my white jump boot, that's how hard I hit it. It snapped that socket in my ankle right in two. Popped it right in two, and it broke the big toe on my other foot and messed up my other toes and my shin. It knocked me out and it tipped the tree over on a slight angle. I was just hanging there and my partner there, Don Heinicke, knew that I'd had this head injury at the Naval Academy and he saw my face smash right into the tree. He said it was the first thing that came into his mind, "My God. Art hit his head again." You know.

I finally came to and I remember hearing the airplane, it

was circling right over my head, and I thought I had a bee in my helmet. A bumble bee in my helmet. And I finally came to, and boy, my feet hurt. And I... boy, I was mad, because I needed the money for school. And I knew was... I was afraid all done jumping. So I came to and Don hollered up to me, "You all right?" I had... this thing was smashed into my face so good I couldn't open my mouth to talk. Then... and I just nodded to him that I was all right. And then I... I was nervous and I went to thread my let down rope through my harness.

We'd done it, time and time again. You could do it with your eyes closed. But somewhere I went wrong and I popped my quick release and my harness fell off. The rope was tangled around my shoulder and I was hanging by my arm. [laughs] So I finally got the darn thing freed up and came on down. Don didn't dare try to climb the tree to help me because it was already tipping a little bit. And he was afraid if he came up and got out there with me, it would tip over and we'd both get messed up. So we signaled the plane that I had a leg injury and they already had the rescue crews committed so they just dropped us a note. We'd have to get out by ourselves.

So we fashioned a crutch out of a tree thing. We had cut it with a saw and made a couple crutches. Then we looked at our map. We were three miles from Yellowstone Lake and it was getting... we jumped at seven at night, so by the time we got all this straightened around it was dark. So we went through the darkness and we got about a half mile from the lake and I just couldn't walk anymore. I was walking on my right ankle, which was broken, because my left foot hurt so bad from my toes that I thought that that's where my injury was, my serious injury. So I walked two and a half miles on a broken socket and finally, I couldn't walk any farther. So Don carried me on out to the lake. I'll never forget it because I weighed 165 and he weighed a 155. And he carried me on his back on out there.

When I saw him at the reunion the first night there Friday night, I said, "Don Heinicke" and he said, "By gosh, Art," he said, "Last time I saw you, I was packin' you out of the woods on my back." So we got out to Yellowstone Lake and we built a great big fire and, of course, they... plane got back and told the ranger there, at the lake, that they had an injured man. He'd be coming out to the lake, but they didn't know where. So we built a great big fire. It was about 11 o'clock at night and we heard the boat coming. They sent a boat with a ranger in it and he picked me up and took me back to where there was a road. The Ranger Station, I guess, and then I went by pickup... I walked to the pickup and got in the pickup and we went to Mammoth, Wyoming, to the hospital.

I was mad because they wouldn't let me walk in the hospital. They made me go in on a stretcher. And I said, "I just walked pretty near three miles and I can sure walk into this hospital." And they said, "No, you can't walk on your foot." They had a roving doctor, he went around every three days, and he had just been there that day and left. So I had to wait two more days till the doctor had made his rounds and came back and came in. I was afraid my, whatever was busted, would start healing and that he'd have to break it again, you know.

But I can remember laying in the hospital there, and of course, they had it in the papers. I remember this one little boy coming to my room with his father. His father came in and apologized and he said, "My son always wanted to meet a real live smokejumper, do you care if he comes in?" You know. So here's a little kid came in and I was talking to him laying there.

And then the other two jumpers had come in from their fire. They brought them out to join Heinicke back in where I'd gotten hurt. And when that fire was over, they came out to Yellowstone Lake and they had their fishing rods with them. They'd fasten them to the shovel handles. They knew I liked to eat fish, so they caught some trout and they came in the hospital. They were all dirty and grubby from fighting the fire and they had these trout. They put them on my nightstand and said, "We brought you a little something". Nurse came in and she said, "What are those things... those old stinking things doing over there on your nightstand?" So they cooked them up for me. The cook did there in the hospital. They were really nice to me.

Then when I got released from the hospital, they had a nice farewell party for me in the hospital, down in the basement with the nurses and everything which is kind of nice. So when I went back to West Yellowstone, I was 100% disabled. I had casts on both legs.

We were having this real bad fire season so I'd go out with them. I wasn't on the payroll anymore, but I was drawing compensation. So I'd go out with them and crawl around the plane on my hands and knees. Milligan would drop the jumpers and then he'd jump himself, and then I'd push the cargo out the door. So I did the cargo dropping without pay, or anything, for the rest of the season till I had to go back for college.

[I] had another interesting thing happen while I was on crutches. They had this bear, it was a rogue bear, that had been just raising havoc in the Park. They'd tried to shoot it and they just never could get the thing. And they'd hunted it at night with lights with their fire trucks, and everything. They never... couldn't get it. So we were coming back in from a fire this one afternoon and we saw this bear. He was huge! So when we landed we drove right back to our cabin there at West Yellowstone. There was one Park Ranger there who had a 300

Winchester magnum rifle and... but he wasn't a hunter. He had this gun, and I don't know why he owned this rifle but he had it. And we said... his name was Vern McKnight, he was a seasonal park ranger. And we said, "Can we borrow your rifle? That bear's heading towards the river and I think we can get him." And so...

Vern didn't hunt or anything, but he says, "Yeah, I've got three shells for the gun." So he drove the pickup and I went with him. We drove over and drove in through the woods towards the river. It was an open ponderosa pine stand and we saw the bear. So I got out and ran over towards him and kneeled down by a tree and I shot and I missed him. And when I shot... I never shot the rifle before, I didn't even... it was stupid because I didn't even know where the thing was shooting, you know. So when I shot, the bear turned and started toward... towards us. I shot that time and I hit him and he whirled around and he was biting

at where the bullet went in him. And then I shot him with the last shell and killed him. They had a big to-do about it, there in the park, that somebody finally killed the bear. And had pictures in the paper, and everything. This doctor that was treating me, you know, came around and....

I had busted my cast all up running around through the woods after this stupid bear. I'd already been in and had two casts replaced because I'd go into town much and have a few beers. I loved to dance and I'd dance, see. There was this one girl I was kind of sweet on, she liked to dance and I didn't want to lose her by being a wallflower. So I'd go ahead out and dance. So, this is the third time I'd been in the hospital to get my cast replaced, and this doctor saw the story in the paper and he said, "You break up those casts one more time, I'm gonna disallow your disability payments." You know. He says, "This is ridiculous, you're not doing anything we tell you to do."

So when we were in the plane... I had my fourth set of casts, and we were in the plane, I was out dropping cargo and I was trying to stand up to get over by the door to get this one fire pack and I.... The plane hit a air pocket and it really threw me, and I broke my casts again. I broke one of them, I guess it was, and I know I was scared to go back to the hospital to get it fixed, but I did. But I explained to him that I just took a spill and so he put the fifth one on and then I was all right till I got home. That's what those pictures of that bear are. He was huge! Over there, that I gave the other girl to look at, that was the bear that I shot. So those were a few little different things that we had there in Yellowstone that might not have happened somewhere else.

RF Yeah. Did you encounter a fair amount of wildlife when you were jumping and packing out and stuff?

AF Oh, yeah. Yeah. We had a cow moose put us up a tree one time. And in Yellowstone we had... oh, we used to call them road buffalo. They were the old bulls that had been, kind of, pushed away from the herd by the younger bulls once they, kind of, outlived their usefulness. And they had real bad dispositions and they warned us about them. That they were very contrary and would charge you, you know, for no reason at all. So, anytime we saw these... also when we were packin' out, because you couldn't run very fast with a fire pack on your back, you know. Carrying 100 pounds out with you. So, anytime we saw one we'd make a great big wide detour around it. We never had any real... real trouble with them.

The mosquitoes bothered us more than anything and the mosquitoes in Yellowstone were just horrible that summer. I can remember coming out with our fire packs, and some of those swampy flats and it just... hoards of them would be around your head. And if you stop, you know.... This one guy I remember that was in there, they sent him just temporarily. Don Heinicke had to go to ROTC summer camp for two weeks so they sent a replacement. This kid, whenever we came out from a fire, he'd go real fast. Then he'd have to stop and rest. Then he'd go real fast. Then he'd have to stop and rest. Then he'd go real fast and stop and rest.

And we were going through one of those meadows that one day and those mosquitoes just got after him something fierce. I told him, I said, "If you keep moving, they wouldn't," you know, ..."they wouldn't be after you so bad." But he'd just stop and sit there and then they'd get all around him.

But they were more of a pain in the neck than the wildlife was, you know. We never had any problems with bear coming out or anything. Just that one cow moose. We got between her and her calf and.... We didn't see the calf. The grass was high and we didn't even know the calf was there until after we climbed the tree. And she went back to the calf and they trotted off, but she... they can cover a lot of ground in a hurry, those moose.

RF Yeah, they're pretty big, too.

AF I remember another thing about Yellowstone that was... caused us quite a lot of consternation, was that the maps that we had there were very inaccurate. And carrying those heavy packs... oh, you'd take a compass bearing and it would show there was a stream running in a given direction, and that there'd be a trail on the other side of the stream. So you'd come to the stream and it would be running in the wrong direction. Or you'd come to where a trail was supposed to be and there wasn't any trail. But maybe you'd cross a trail on the other side of the stream, and it showed it was on the far side, and it would be on the near side. So it really messed us up. And then you'd wonder if your compass was wrong. It was an overcast day and you couldn't see the sun to know which direction you were going and it really... it really caused us a lot of problems.

We were talking about it with some other guys that jumped in Yellowstone, and they had the same problem. In fact, they had gone in with one of the rangers to have... to have him pack.... Well, they had... he'd gone in to pack out their stuff and the ranger got messed up in his own ranger district because the maps were wrong, you know. They were totally inaccurate. I don't know whether they've corrected that since or not, but, you know. I just couldn't believe they'd have maps where the drainages and the water courses were actually running in the opposite direction.

RF Yeah, you think they could figure that much out.

AF So that was a thing that was unique to Yellowstone.

RF Did you have any real long pack outs?

AF Yeah, we had one, I believe it was 17 miles, something like that.

RF That was carrying your fire packs the whole way?

AF Yeah. Well, we just carry them till we got to a trail where they could bring in a mule string, or something. But that was how far we went to get cross lots, it was up on a plateau.

RF What were your feelings about the Forest Service there when... how they felt about the smokejumping operation?

AF Well, we were under the Park Service and they held us in very high esteem. They were wonderful, really wonderful to us. They kind of gave us a free hand because they, you know.... I think Milligan had demonstrated that we were all pretty responsible.

The only thing that we messed up on was that night that we jumped on that geyser and didn't know it was a fire, you know. But that... you know, that was a problem. But after that we'd try to get low enough, we had no door on the plane, that you could smell the smoke, you know. So that's probably what we should have done there. But it just never dawned on us. Nobody had ever jumped on a geyser before. It was in an area where, you know... it was way back in. And like Old Faithful, they can pretty well count on when it's gonna erupt. These things just maybe sleep for five years then all of sudden, they steam for a half hour, you know. So it was kind of a strange deal.

RF It must have been some real fantastic country, huh?

AF Oh yeah.

RF To jump in. So you jumped about 40 or so fires, or something like that?

AF Well, I didn't because once I got hurt then I was all done. I had thirteen jumps altogether.

RF How were the cargo drops, did you enjoy doing that?

AF Well, I... just one time when I had my glove on, I put my hand in the thing [cargo to be dropped] and when I got it out the door... I stuck my fingers in it quite a ways and it pretty near pulled me out of the plane. Lost my glove, but that was the only close call I had on doing that.

RF Were you tethered into the plane when you'd make those cargo drops or did... were you just standing in the plane and...?

AF Oh, I was just on my hands and knees in the door. Hanging on, just pushing the stuff out.

RF So it would have been quite a problem if you'd gotten knocked out?

AF Oh, yeah. Yeah, but it was no big deal, you know. Just everybody's trying to help everybody else out because they had a bad situation there in the Park. So we did what we had to do. I wasn't in any hurry to get home. I didn't think I could drive with both my feet in casts, anyway.

But, I ended up... I did drive home with both my feet in casts. I had a manual transmission in my car and it had a hand throttle on it. So I'd use my hand. I headed home... I drove the car all the way back to New York with just.... I could use my

one foot on the clutch and the brake, and I worked the gas with my hand. That's how I drove home. I remember pulling in a gas station in Cleveland and I got out. The guy said, "You driving that car? Like that?" And I said, "Yeah!"

I had to sit sideways in the seat because this leg was in a cast all the way up here. So I worked the clutch and the brake with my left foot, and worked the throttle with my right hand. And like, when I came to a stop sign or anything, I just kicked the car out of gear so it was in neutral. Then I'd work the brake till I stopped. And then, if it was on a hill, I just pull the emergency brake on. When I was ready to leave, I'd push the clutch in and shift it and pull out on the gas thing. I got it so I was pretty good at it.

RF What was the longest fire that you had to work on?

AF Gee, I don't even remember that. It's been 31 years ago. No, we got most of them out within a day after we dropped on them and then we'd get the line around them. We'd have to stay 24 hours after the last smoke to make sure that it was dead because they took a lot of pride in not ever having to go back, you know.

In fact, you better not have to go back! So what we did; we always took our fishing rods and tied them to the shovel handle. And while you were going through this 24 hour "waiting for a smoke" period, why, if there were any streams nearby, one of us would go fish while the other one watched the fire. Baby sat it. So that was kind of good duty.

RF That's great! [laughs]

AF Yeah. No, we didn't abuse it, you know. We... we'd get out as soon as we could. Smokejumpers aren't the kind of people that like to sit around. So one guy could be busy doing something and... while the other one kept an eye out for smoke.

RF Other than the two fires that you said were too big for the four of you, were they... all the others, things that you guys could handle?

AF Yeah. They were pretty routine. Just lightning strikes mostly. Just saw down the snag with a cross-cut and get a line around the thing and....

The only fire we ever had got away from us was when we were at Nine Mile in training. And they... after we got through with our fire behavior courses and everything, they took us up back of camp and they actually ignited an area. And then we had to put fire line around it. Well, this day, conditions were just right and the darn thing got away from us, and we had a awful time with it. In fact, it was really embarrassing because it burned off quite an area, but we finally got it out. It was sure more than a practice fire!

RF Yeah.

AF It turned into the real thing. And those pictures that I

gave the other girl there, those fires burning and the trees crowning out, and everything. That was taken right there that day that we had our practice fire. And that thing just plum really got away from us. I forget how many acres it burned. Seemed to me it was about 40 and it was right in the timber. We had our work cut out for us.

There's one picture there of the crew when we got done. We took a picture and everybody was really dirty and tired. A little bit embarrassing... for the instructors, you know, because they supposedly had the thing all under control, and it just plum got away from us!

RF You can't predict Mother Nature all that well sometimes!

AF Yeah! So. I don't know whether they have real practice situations or not at the new depot. I don't know whether they go back and... but they had everything just as realistic as could be and we'd get right out there and pound the ground.

RF So when you, when... you felt that everything, the training really did help you out?

AF Oh yeah, it was super training! Really great! Yeah. I've had a lot of respect for all the instructors and everybody. Never met one bad apple in the whole bunch, you know. They were just... everybody was great. And then, seeing them at the reunion here, I couldn't get over...! You look at all these guys, 6 or 700 of them, and hardly a fat one in the bunch. At this point in our life, you know.

RF Yeah.

AF Yeah. I'll be 55 here pretty quick. I went out and ran that 10K race yesterday and just, you know. Really enjoyed it. Quite a remarkable group of people when you stop and think about it. Yeah, they really are.

RF Everybody's emphasized how much they like the activity and the wilderness.

AF Yeah. Well, you're seeing it at its best, you get back in the wilderness areas.

I came back out the next year and tried to get in again, but the doctor wouldn't.... I don't know whether you heard my ankle snap here a minute ago when I... but my ankle snaps all the time. It doesn't hurt. Absolutely no discomfort or anything. But the doctor heard that and he says, "What was that noise?", and I said, "Oh, it's just my ankle, it pops like that all the time." He said, "Well, doesn't it hurt?" I said, "No". He said, "You can't jump if your ankle is doing that!" And I said, "Well, I played soccer in college, why can't I go back jumping?" He says, "No way!" You know.

He wouldn't let me. I was really heart broken, but I ended up... I went up to Alaska and got a job up there working for the Forest Service. So actually it was a blessing in disguise. So, I

got to go to Alaska! I might never have gotten up there! I'd probably been jumping for years if I could have.

RF Yeah. Um, do you have any other fires or any other things about the base, that really sort of stick out?

AF No. I made a note here of the things that were a little unusual and that's about the only things that I can think of that were out of the ordinary, you know. That someone else wouldn't have covered.

RF Yeah. Let me turn over the tape here.

[END OF SIDE A]

[SIDE B]

AF I ended up getting a cold, I don't know why.

RF When you talked to other jumpers that were like, stationed in Missoula and other places. Did they have things that they told you that pointed out how different it was at Yellowstone? Or were you aware of differences?

AF Well, I think Yellowstone was... was like... comparing when I was in the Navy, being on a little destroyer, or being on a battleship or a carrier. It was a little more regimented and a little more strict, I imagine.

We were pretty casual crew, you know. I think it was because Milligan knew us and knew that we were responsible, and that if we told him we'd be a certain place, we'd be there. It was a very casual thing. We hung around the hangar. We set up punching bags and we just worked out, and we had a swimming hole up the road. We'd go up and swim and, you know. It was good conditioning and he knew where we were. If we said, "We're going up to the swimming hole." That's where we were. If there was a fire call he'd know right where we were and we could get right out and get on it. We didn't have much time to go swimming but it was a... I just loved it down there.

I'm not one for bigness and my... even my children. My boy went into the Marine Corps because he liked the smaller outfit. More esprit de corps, this kind of thing. And I liked that. When I was in the Navy, I was on a smaller ship. And I don't like big, regimented organizations. I think you just, probably have to have that [regimentation] more like in Missoula, than you would in a little... kind of, outpost station.

RF You said the pay was a little bit better with the Park Service?

AF It was my recollection that we got time and a half for anything over eight hours or anything over forty hours a week. But one of the other fellas was saying today, that he thought we just got a... an additional amount per hour, but it didn't amount to like time and a half or double time, or whatever. I brought

those... those contracts that I signed when I went to West Yellowstone, but it just gave the per annum rate of \$1.64 an hour and there wasn't any mention of overtime, but my pay slips that I gave the girl over there, they'll... you could probably divide it out and see how much I got.

Yeah. It paid more because Forest Service was straight time no matter how many hours you worked, as I recall, and that was one of the reasons everybody wanted that Yellowstone assignment. Because it was more bucks.

Getting hurt actually worked out, financially, to be a good thing for me because I drew full compensation. 100% disability for, I don't know how many months, after I went back East. While I was in college, I was drawing pay that I'd have been terminated when I left here to go home. So actually, from the stand point of school, it was beneficial that I got hurt. But it kind of cramped my style!

RF Yeah. What'd you do after...? Well, you went to college and then you say you...?

AF Well, when I left college... when I finished college, I went to the West coast. Got a job with the Forest Service working... supposedly, was gonna work in Alaska. Then they had a funding shortage and they cut out that project up there. So I ended up working in California, in an entomology and plant quarantine unit with a Dr. Kimmey. He was a pathologist, very well known. We'd met in Alaska on a fishing stream and he just took to me. Liked me. And so he offered me a job as soon as I was out of college. He said, "You be in California, you've got a job." So I was there and I got a job and was working with him.

Then I got drafted and went to Fort Ord in California, took my basic and put in for overseas, so.... I didn't want to hang out in the states. I wanted to travel. So, they sent me to Korea. Then... I'm probably one of the few people that like Korea. I really enjoyed getting to know the people and traveling in the back country. It was off limits.

When I came back from Korea, I went to work for the State Conservation Department as a forester. I worked my way up through with them and then I finally got a job at Cornell. They lured me away from the state, and I taught at Cornell for a year. Didn't like teaching so [I] went back to the state and worked my way up through to Regional Forester.

I was a Regional Forester for seven years. Office-bound, getting fat and lazy, and getting ulcers. And I says, "This isn't for me!" So I resigned after I'd been Regional Forester. I was 48 when I took an early retirement and vested my rights. I just work for myself now. Guiding hunters, and growing Christmas trees, and logging, selling firewood and fence posts, and just, do whatever I want to do.

RF How did your smokejumping experience affect (inaudible)?

AF Well, I think the discipline and... always helps, of course. I had discipline at home, and then in the Naval Academy, and then the.... So it's just kind of a continuation of a philosophy that

I've enjoyed all my life and... but it was, you know, certainly a wonderful experience. I don't think anybody who was ever in the jumpers didn't benefit by it by becoming a better person.

RF All these people at the reunion you see, and thinking about yourself and the people you jumped with, what's common in all of you?

AF Well, I think one thing, [the] fellas all went out and made something of themselves. This was... I was amazed to find what some of the guys have done with their lives. And that they're all in, still, good physical condition. This is just flabbergasts me that, you know, that... I've always taken a pride in how I... how I can get around. I love to hunt. I come out here every fall hunting elk and deer and get back in the mountains.

My wife, fortunately, has gone along with it. She understands this... a need I have to fulfill, so there is no problem at home on it.

But, you know, the kind of person that makes a smokejumper, apparently, is a kind of person that goes on in life and has those things that you need to do pretty well. Hunt Hatch, the boy that came out with me when we first came out here, is a Trans-World Airline pilot. [He] flies... he's a captain on a 727. Has a big ranch in Idaho, a fishing boat in Alaska... I worked with him on his boat last summer, netting salmon for the whole summer. And, you know, he's just fantastically successful.

Chuck Viviano was on our crew. He's a captain in Los Angeles Fire Department... has a whole unit all of his own. Don Heinicke, the guy that packed me out on his back, he went on through college. He's a horticulturist and very well respected in... all over the United States. And Tommy Hodges [Thomas W. Hodges], who came out with me the next year when I couldn't pass the physical, he works with IBM. He's got a real good job with IBM, finished college and, you know. The guys... it's just unbelievable, you know, what they've gone on and done with themselves.

RF Do you think that's the self-confidence that you instill in you, from being able to jump?

AF You being used to working hard, playing hard... and jumpers all play pretty hard, too. I know I used to! That's why I'd bust up my cast dancing when I [laughs].... I couldn't wait till my legs got better, want to get it done now.

RF Anything else you'd like to add about...?

AF Gee, I really can't think of anything. Of course, I just jumped the one year, so my... my reservoir of stories isn't as full as many of the people that jumped a lot more than I did.

RF Well, everybody's had a... their own perspective, but it's interesting how everything is beginning to come together.

AF Yeah.

RF When I ask about, you know, what the smokejumpers experience was or what you all have in common, we're getting some real interesting material.

AF Yeah, yeah! And we've maintained our friendships all these years. Now, Hatch, that boy that I come out with, I come out here every summer and river raft with him. He's got his own rafts and everything, and I'm meeting him tomorrow. We're going up and hike 31 miles over the mountains into the head of South Fork, of the Flathead, and raft down to Hungry Horse Reservoir, you know. I live in New York and he lives in Idaho, but every year we get together. Some years I've come out and hunted in the Selway with him for elk. He's got his own mules and we just pack in, and we have a great time together.

Chuck Viviano was a fireman in L.A., he calls me probably once a month. Has ever since.... when we were in the jumpers together. We keep in touch. Yeah, it's amazing.

RF Well, that's a pretty unique job to [have] bound all of you together that way.

AF Yeah, well, I think the thing that binds you together is when you go out the door of an airplane together. You have to kind of rely on the other person because, if you get hurt, you know, you're out there a long way from help and he's the only one between you and help. So you... you build a pretty firm bond and it's just natural, I guess.

RF Well, if you don't have anything else...?

AF I guess that'll do her. [laughs]

RF Well, thank you very much, really appreciate it!

AF A pleasure to be interviewed.

[END OF INTERVIEW]