

Maureen and Mike

Mansfield Library

UNIVERSITY OF MONTANA

Archives and Special Collections

Mansfield Library, University of Montana

Missoula MT 59812-9936

Email: library.archives@umontana.edu

Telephone: (406) 243-2053

The following transcript is a scan of the original that has been converted to text and has not been edited. Because of this, transcript may not match audio recording exactly.

Please bear in mind that you are reading the spoken word rather than the written word.

For additional assistance, please contact Archives and Special Collections.

Oral History Number: OH 133-045

Interviewee: Brooks Henderson

Interviewer: Bev Buckner

Date of Interview: July 21, 1984

Project: Smokejumpers 1984 Reunion Oral History Project

Bev Buckner: I just want to make sure I have this correct. You jumped from 1969 to '74. OK, why don't you give me a little history of your Forest Service work history prior to smokejumping or post- smokejumping.

Brooks Henderson: I started jumping in '69 but I started, the Forest Service in 1967, right out of high school on the Six Rivers National Forest, Six Rivers in Region Five and I worked there one season. The next season I quit the Forest Service, or most of the fire season and was hired back for a lightning bust at the end of the year and finished out till December. Then the next May I went jumping. I worked a little bit that fall, or that spring planting trees. But I believe I only had about eight months of Forest Service experience before I started jumping. That's all I had under my belt when I started jumping in '69. So I was, that crew, I was not only the youngest, but I had the least amount of fire experience of anybody else on the crew that year.

BB: So what got you interested in smokejumping in the first place?

BH: Well, the FMO [Fire Management Officer] on the district was an ex-jumper. Gary Johnson, who is now the foreman at Redding, the superintendent, he and I worked on the district together and he was going down to the...to fill out the application. I thought that sounded like a pretty good thing to do at the time. I guess I was probably pretty young and immature actually at the time, cause I got into the Forest Service almost on a whim cause we took a forestry class in high school. One of the things we had to do was fill out an application, that was before computer hiring. So you just filled out a 171, so I got the job. Then about the same way I got into jumping, I, in both cases, as I got into the Forest Service not knowing really what I was getting into, I really found my niche. I really liked it. I really liked the people. Then when I got into the jumping in '69, it didn't take me very long at all to realize [laughing] that I kind of found my niche there also.

BB: So you say you were the youngest. How old were you when you started?

BH: I don't think I broke any age records, but I started training when I was nineteen. I was twenty shortly after, but I was actually nineteen when I started. Most everybody else on the crew was in their twenty's. In those days, at Redding, it was a training operation, and they didn't hire college students. About half the crew was college and the other half were detailers, people who detailed off the districts to jump. Since I wasn't going to school at the time, I started with the early group, started around the 5th of May. They were mostly people off the districts like I was, except I didn't have an appointment, I was a temporary. So, those guys

tended to be older since they had appointments. So of that crew that started in May, I was the youngest of that one. Then when the college crew started, as it turned out, there was only one person younger than me.

BB: You were saying that you found that it was your niche. What do you mean by niche?

BH: Well, I just went into it not knowing really anything the Forest Service did except...planted trees and fought fires. I didn't know anything to do with the everyday stuff and really what it was about, and that type of just getting out and actually, you know, working hard and doing that forestry related stuff and just the people were earthy, real earthy, woodsy people. Up until that time, I liked to hunt and fish, but at 18 I never really thought about lifestyles that much.

But when I got out there, I really did kind of identify with that a lot. I don't wanna sound too sentimental on it, or anything like that, but I just really liked it.

BB: Yeah ...so where were you stationed then?

BH: The Six Rivers National Forest is inland from Eureka...California. It's just barely out of the coastal influence. It borders the Shasta-Trinity National Forest. It runs the length of the, the district runs a big portion of the length of the Southfork Mountain, which is one of the largest uninterrupted ridges in the continental United States. We just lay on western exposure of that, Big Timber District.

BB: So is that where you were based as a smokejumper?

BH: No, I was based as a smokejumper in Redding, but I worked on the district on the Six Rivers. Then everybody goes to Redding. It was a small crew, sorta like Missoula. You don't ever go back to the district. Once you jump you always stay at Redding. I noticed that on the questionnaire, which I forgot, they talk about project work. Redding didn't have that, once you were there jumping, you stayed right there. There was always enough to keep you busy at Redding.

BB: Hmm. Why don't you tell me a little bit about your training going into smokejumping? What was that like?

BH: Well, there again, I didn't have any idea what it was like. I'd never read a book or anything, but the night before they said how rough it was gonna be. That was my, it has been my only sleepless night, somehow I got so excited, I never did sleep that night. I haven't never had a sleepless night since or before. I thought that everybody said it was gonna be really rough. I'd got into it a few days and it wasn't any rougher than high school football training.

But it was a lot of fun. You had a loft foreman at Redding do a lot of the training. He was an old Marine, he really identified with that. He gave you a hard time. It was always real good natured

at Redding, but they kept ya real busy. It was real hard, you know. It's in Redding in May, it can already get over 100 degrees. But, of course, with the jump suits, it was real hot. It was real hard. Well, you'd think you were in good shape, but then the landing simulator, and nobody in high school, you never even heard of anything called neck rolls. So, between doing neck rolls, which is just a kind of an isometric neck exercise, between doing that and, and some of the simulators, you were real stiff. I've never been so sore in my life. But not so much from the exercises as it was from the training itself.

BB: You mentioned a Marine loft foreman. Do you remember his name?

BH: Oh yes. Ah, his name was Bob Kersh, K E-R-S-H. Probably he started at Redding, the first year that they had Redding, he was there. He was instrumental in the design of the NCSC, the Northern California Service Center. It's where the loft was built in the 60's, early 60's. Before then, they had a Quonset hut in Redding and the jumpers just drove out to the base, out to the airport. Bob was really a craftsman and a lot of innovation. He was responsible for the design of the smokejumper portion of the NCSC. He really controlled a lot of the work ethic, the attitudes and everybody's just general outlook at Redding from '57 or '58 through 196...I could be corrected on this, but I think he retired in about '75 or '76. He was the figurehead at Redding for all those years and he wasn't a jumper.

BB: What kind of attitude did he establish there?

BH: Just...

BB: What was it like working with him or under him?

BH: Well, he was a...salt of the earth type, you know. Once you'd got to know him, but until you'd kind of proven yourself to him, which was more than just become qualified, you had to be a worker. You just had to be a good guy, ya know, an average guy at least. He was kinda almost a father image. He was the controller of the loft and almost a reward and punishment system. If you worked really hard and they wanted a pog or a new man to work in the loft, and he'd noticed ya and ya got to work in there. He was a real perfectionist. He taught ya how to do something and it was right. He controlled things because the loft was the center of the social activities during working hours. Bob just kind of controlled the mood of everything there. He controlled who got harassed, who didn't get harassed, 'n that sort of thing. But I have to admit...it was fair. There's no such thing as fair harassment. [laughter] He was the one, just a real good guy.

BB: Did you have very many people wash out when you were training?

BH: The years, the first, I jumped in Redding in '69, then I went to McCall in '70, which is another base ...and '71. And those the years, I know in '69 nobody washed out. At McCall, we were project work crew there so we weren't around the new people. But I know that McCall

washed more out than we did. They had a bigger crew. They trained twice to three times as many people and they hired more new men than they needed. So if things got rough they had to get really rough, which meant they washed a couple of guys out, at least that's what it seemed. But, no, it wasn't 'til about 1972 that I noticed people washing out. I don't know, I almost got the feeling that by then, I don't know how, but smokejumping must of hit the headlines a little more than it was when I started. Because you could see that the guys that washed out were kinda like I was when I first started. They went into it just thinkin' maybe it was the right thing to do at the time without givin' it a whole lot of thought.

BB: Um hum. You were talking a little bit about simulators. What exactly were they about?

BH: Well, the landing simulator, we called it the mutilator, was just an A-frame. It had two cables and you were just pulled up a wench, a wench line at a probably sixty degree angle. When you got to the top, then they let you down then you fell at an angle that a...came close to being the forward speed and the drop of a parachute. You're expected to do, ya know, your rolls when you hit the ground. Of course you were really scared. You know, they called it the mutilator and they told all these horrible lies about it. When you hit the ground, it pulled a lot, just cause when you hit the ground you were...you know, your knuckles were so white. You pulled a lot of muscles.

The next year when we went through it retread when ya hit the ground, I remember the first thing I thought of was, ya know, what was the big deal about this? [laughter] You don't even hit the ground that hard. But we called it the mutilator and it was responsible for more people probably getting in trouble as far as doing things right, and during training and anything else. That was the hardest thing to get done cause it was probably the most important thing, was landing. You were expected to do your front rolls, side rolls and backward rolls. People really had a hard time with it. A lot of harassment went on there.

BB: What do you mean by harassment?

BH: Oh, just, you know in high school, how the kids harassed ya, like the kids do. But here was the first place, I guess, I've never been in the military, but it was the first thing where your coaches harassed. Instead of, if you did something bad, their criticism came out to you a little more on a harassment side than it did as encouragement. But then if they'd see improvement, then they were put to a pat on the back. But you had to prove your worth so to speak before you got any pats on the back. By that you just, they had to see some uh, something in you that you were either really trying real hard out there on the units was the best way to do it. Now I was having some trouble with it just cause it was so scary, of not doing well. So I remember I practiced at home, went back to my parents, I was living in the barracks, but I went home one week-end and got up on about a four foot fence and just practiced for hours, or a couple hours anyway. It apparently paid off cause I got there the next Monday and they said, well, you've improved. They were put to say that. But then if they thought you were just kinda coasting, well you'd really catch it. Which is I'm sure the way it is at Missoula too.

BB: Why don't you tell me a little bit about your first jump out of a plane? You went from your simulator and then you went for a practice jump I'm sure.

BH: Yeah I was.

BB: What was it like going up in that plane the first time?

BH: Well, they mix you up with guys that have jumped before, and to this day, I try and think back of whether I was just psyched up from the training or I was just so young that I was just following the next guy along. But I really, I remember not being all that scared at all. Plus the first jump, you know, they used to jump in three-man sticks. Three guys'd go out the door at one time. I was the third man so I couldn't even see anything from where I was.

They told us before we went that the, this is a kind of interesting sidelight I guess, that the malfunctions only occur, I think they said about one every four hundred jumps ya get some sort of a major malfunction of a parachute. So I went out and as soon as I hit, the chute opened. You check the chute to make sure everything is OK. I remember being really elated. Like I said, I've always thought back, ya know, was I just out of it or was it the product of good training? [laughter] I don't know which. I remember I didn't do the best job of steering. They talk to you on the megaphones. I guess I didn't do what they said. I didn't land that far from the spot but I can remember 'em telling me, ya know, if you just did this you would have made it right in there. I thought I was real calm and collected until I got on the ground and ya know, your zipper goes way up on your collar. I don't know if my shirt was caught in it or what, but it was a normally fairly easy maneuver to get the zipper unstuck, but I had to have help [laughter] to get the zipper unstuck. So I must have been pretty keyed up.

We had twelve or thirteen guys going out of the airplane and we had two major malfunctions that jump. I can remember being on the ground saying, I'm glad I'm not on the airplane watching these malfunctions. [laughing] They're trying to jump, but at least I was already on the ground. One guy broke his leg and he was an old man. The other guy was OK. They both had to pull their reserves. They had what we call a Mae West, but all they are is line overs, where one of your suspension lines loops over the top of the parachute and makes almost two small parachutes out of it. It slips a lot more air and the descent's quite a bit faster. It's also sometimes more, it's fairly dangerous in the respect that you've gotta deploy your emergency right or your emergency can get tangled up your main chute and then collapse the whole thing. Your kinda damned if you do and damned if you don't, ya know. You'll hit too hard for sure if you don't do it right and then whole thing may come in on you.

BB: So your first fire jump would have been out of Redding?

BH: Um hum, except we were in Alaska.

BB: Your first fire call was at Alaska.

BH: Um hum. All of a sudden we got trained and there was a call for Alaska and we went up there. So my first fire jump was unusual from the standpoint that I thought I was gonna go up there and jump with the natives and the wilderness. As it turned out, it was on the Kenai Peninsula. When the airplane turns on final to drop the jumpers they're usually flying in long ovals, as they drop the streamers, tight ovals, and where we had turned the corner head back over the jump spot, we'd be right over a big oil derrick out in the ocean. I wasn't prepared for that, I didn't expect that on my first fire jump. Then the second surprise was that we were jumping on a fire that was started by a guy clearing land for a trailer court. So [chuckle] we had state tankers there pumping water for us. All the townspeople brought out crab louis for us and coffee and cinnamon rolls and fresh milk. It was kinda like bein' on a fire on the outskirts of Missoula 'n all the townspeople, of course, comin' out to meet ya, and lookin' atcha. [laughing]

BB: Did ya have any trouble on that jump landing in that kind of a situation opposed to going in the timber or anything?

BH: Well, there were three new men jumping. We only jumped six of us on it, three new men and three old men. We probably had fifty acres worth of meadow, kinda narrow. All the new men were in the trees and all the old men were in the meadow [laughing] like they were supposed to. But no, it wasn't different. I was probably a little more nervous there than I was any place else that I wanted to do on my first fire jump. It was pretty low keyed fire jump. At least then, the Alaskan jumpers were pretty low keyed about the about the whole situation up there.

BB: Could you explain to me what an average day would be like being a smokejumper?

BH: Oh yeah. That's considering the fact that your average day's not a fire call. So your average day at Redding would be in the...getting there and just small talk for a couple minutes and going out on PT and then running. When I first started in '69 and '70 running was much different than it is now. Anybody that ran a mile all year was considered a real long distance runner. You had to qualify, it was just a half mile run, except for the new men ran a mile. It kinda varied from year to year. During training you ran a mile and then during the rest of the year you just ran about three quarters of a mile, which was from where we did PT, around a hanger and to the volleyball court. So an average day was that, a run ended with an hour of volleyball. Then we'd get back. I said Redding was only about twenty five jumpers. By the time you took the foreman and two squadleaders, it hurt Missoula. There's a squadleader for every six men. There we had 2 squadleaders for twenty-five. So what you ended up with was about nineteen jumpers, most of 'em being new men when I started, cause you didn't have old timers. You only had your squadleaders who were your only old timers, and maybe two more guys. Basically more than three quarters of the crew were new men. So after you did your PT and your volleyball, then you'd just line up for project work around NCSC, which is just a big complex. There's a big auto shop in those days, fire warehouse dispatch center, acres of lawns and tulips. We used to do all

the gardenin' around there and all the odd jobs and help the maintenance people. That's where our day would get off with.

BB: Did you have a squadleader that you remember pretty well?

BH: Yeah. There were two squadleaders. Ya didn't know who you were gonna have, just whoever walked by was the one that was in charge of ya. I mean when ya got on a fire, whoever was of course with ya on the jump list. We had Brian Schaeffer, who since quit and Dave Nani who's now the loft foreman, jumping loft foreman at Redding. I remember 'em both really well. They were real opposites in personalities. Brian used to get a lot of harassment. He was a, without going into it, marched to the beat of a different drummer so to speak. Dave Nani, who was more of a typical smokejumper, and just a really good person who I'm still really good friends with, he was a really good guy. I really looked up to Dave. In those days, he used to take a lot of good-natured harassment, but he was a real good man. I remember 'em both, but they're overshadowed as far as memories. Somebody that stands out in the organization, it was Bob Kersh and then Richard Tracy who was an ex-Missoula man, Silver City foreman. They were the two standouts. The two squadleaders were kinda overshadowed by those two guys.

BB: So right after Redding you went to McCall.

BH: Yeah, that was my second year.

BB: OK. What was that like...at McCall versus Redding?

BH: Oh, it was completely different. It's hard to say how tangible the differences were. Besides just being physically different, Redding, like Missoula, down in a valley, fairly hot, fairly big city, and shirt sleeves, and what not. McCall was real mountainous, a much smaller town, much greener and reeked of historic values. There was Wayne Webb and Del Catlin, the two loft foremen, who'd been jumping ever since '46. It was just a completely different atmosphere. They had some personnel problems when I was there. They had a foreman they didn't like, so there was a fair amount of turmoil there. But it was a real good year.

There you did project work. It was really neat for me, cause like I said, I was well established, I knew that this was all I wanted to do in the foreseeable future. It was really neat when we used to get up to go on project work. It'd be way out in the wilderness and the project work was neat. I think it was just the atmosphere there. It was real mountainous and just an even more wild atmosphere than Redding. At Redding you were real detached from the Forest Service. You were just there. You transplant iris', you do work in the loft. At McCall, you're just right there in the woods. You're out doin' project work. It felt much closer to the Forest Service.

BB: What kind of project work did you do down there?

BH: We built fences. We opened up stations that had been closed all winter and put the tents

over the tent frames, chopped firewood. I already mentioned I repaired fences, built trails, and just things like that mostly. Then we tree planted quite a bit. Later in the year we bucked hay bales for the forest livestock.

BB: You think that there was much of an attitude difference between Redding and McCall?

BH Overall, really not. If anything I would say that Redding was a little more gung-ho and serious than most. That was because it seemed, Redding fought a lot of fires in southern California which can be pretty serious stuff. They seemed to be just a little more serious, and also because Redding, ya gotta remember, at least half of the crew would be people that had appointments and worked on the districts. They jumped there that one year and they had to go back on the district. So they brought a lot of that with 'em. They got mixed in with a little smokejumping whatever and then go back to the districts. Where in McCall, it was schoolteachers and people just working in the summers for whatever type of job you could do that with and college students. I'm not meaning this as a putdown, but I thought they weren't quite as serious about things. They seemed to be a little more into having a good time, which ya know, younger people would be, bachelors ya know, single people and ya know who would be into. But there was a difference in that respect.

BB: What about Alaska? Where exactly in Alaska did you .•. ?

BH: Well, I was at Anchorage which was a jump base. They had a satellite base at McGrath which is central Alaska, maybe westerly a little bit. There that was just like the United Nations because you had...Alaska had a fairly small crew in those days, at least in McGrath and Anchorage area. You had crews from Missoula, Redding and all the different bases up there. So it was kind of a mixture of all the different attitudes up there. It was a real neat place because you got to visit everybody else and see what they were doing and what they thought of things and how many fire jumps they were getting.

BB: How, what time span exactly were you at Alaska then?

BH: I was real fortunate. My first three years jumping I went up to Alaska every year on details. They were all details unless you jumped 'em with the BLM, that was a detail up there for the lower forty-eight. They got into trouble fire-wise earlier than we did so we'd go up there in the spring. I went there three years. One time we stayed five or six days, but the other times it's been fourteen, seventeen days.

BB: How'd you feel about jumping up there opposed to down here? Was the terrain a lot different to handle?

BH: Oh, you felt like you were on a vacation. I think a person could get in trouble, be getting too lackadaisical because the caribou moss was real soft. But then again it was uneven and I s'pose it could be easier to twist your ankle. But we always thought it was a privilege and a treat and a

vacation to go up there. Because they were the BLM, we used to call it the bureau of loose money. They seemed to have a lot more money to spare, they were a lot more liberal on their overtime. You'd go up there and make a lot of overtime. The fires were real easy to put out, they were really easy to put out or they were just so large, and you were so vastly undermanned, that all you did was just kinda watch 'em. Or you were overhead and you bossed native crews, a supervisor of native crews.

BB: How was it working with native crews? Were they pretty good people to work with?

BH: Yeah. The ones I worked around, that was just a way to earn extra money. They weren't professional like you look at a hotshot crew, but they did the job. They just weren't that well organized. You couldn't compare 'em even with an OC crew down on the lower forty-eight. They were just a crew of bodies pretty loosely formed, at least when I was there. That was my frame of reference, that they were just pretty loosely bound. They were just bodies out there stampin' the fire out, but then you can put the fire out with a gunny sack.

BB: You mentioned professional. How do you feel about professionalism? Do you consider yourself a professional?

BH: Well, do you mean professional as a—

BB: Smokejumper, do you consider yourself a professional smokejumper?

BH: Um hum. I did, yeah, of course, when I did it. I get mixed up because when you'd be working on the district, there were professional foresters in a completely different series grade and then there were technicians. But yeah. I thought I had a real professional outlook on it. I really took it real seriously. I was never strictly gung-ho, but I think I had above average professional pride in the base and our image, cause the California had, oh hey, and not going against it, was the fact that it had retreads which were the guys that worked on the districts and only came back if we needed 'em. They tended to not be in as good as good as shape as a regular smokejumper. They were out for a little more of a good time it seemed like.

BB: Now, retreads, what does that mean exactly?

BH: Well, kinda what the name implies. Simply, it's people who have jumped a full season and then are given the opportunity to come back each spring and make three practice jumps and go through the units for three days. Then they go back to the districts, then if we have a, you see, there's only twenty-five jumpers at Redding. So if we needed help and didn't or couldn't want to go to another region, then we could call them in off the districts. They had their jump suits all waiting and they were there to make fire jumps.

BB: So tell me a little bit more about project work. You say, Redding, that there wasn't much and McCall, you got to work in the woods. Did you do any project work in Alaska?

BH: No.

BB: Just strictly fire.

BH: Yeah. They just weren't set up to supervise us.

BB: Okay. How many fires about did you jump in your career then?

BH: I had 78 total, but I had 45 fire jumps and the remainder were practice. I think anymore that doesn't sound like so many, cause now with safety first, you're required to have a practice jump, I think, every two weeks. When I jumped, after your first year, you maybe only had three practice jumps, because in a good fire season, you'd get your three practice jumps and never have another practice jump the rest of the year. I had 45 fire which was a good proportion, a good proportion. I was real lucky, I only had one bad year. Every other year, I was on the high side of all the fire jumps, just good fortune, being in the right place at the right time.

BB: What year was your bad year?

BH: That was '71. That was just a year I didn't have a heck of a lot of backpacking, and fishing and hanging around at the lake. It was at that year I was at the wrong place at all the right times. [laughs]

BB: Where were you stationed then?

BH: In Redding.

BB: Redding. So you kinds of went back and forth between Redding and McCall?

BH: Just for one year. I started going to a junior college. I decided I'd better do it where I could maybe stick to the books a little bit more 'n I would be at McCall, plus the finances. So I went back to Redding. I was working towards the end of my career. I wanted to be out of Region 5, wanted to get to a jump base that was closer to the woods. That just never happened so that's one of the reasons I left the jumping. But all the rest of the time I was at Redding and happy there.

BB: Do you have any big fires that you were that you got to go on, or any memorable fires, or anything like that?

BH: Well, a couple stick out in my mind. We had a joint jump with Cave Junction up on the Klamath. They came down from Oregon to jump on it. Well, really what makes it memorable was that it was a real hot fast burning fire. They had that as a backdrop from the airplane when we were jumping and the spot was a was a log landing, and with cutlock on the other side. It

hadn't been logged yet. So it was quite the mess. The jump spot was that little landing. If you overshot it, you went in out there into the slash. If ya undershot it, you went into the snags below the road. So when I jumped ...when I jumped you could just see all these chutes draped in trees and chutes out in the cutlock, pretty small cutlock, landing, to hit. I was third man out and I got twists where when you go out you spin and you just wrap up your lines a little bit. Naturally just like phone cord, you unravel and go then you take a couple of spins the other way. So by the time you get unraveled, if your chute was pointing the wrong way, you really lost a lot of ground. When I finally straightened out, the two guys, they were running with the wind. They were probably 50 vertical feet above me, cause I'd been going off to about 45 and I was way behind them. I just knew I there were snags. I could see Cave Junction guys, they must've been dropped awful far out cause there's a whole bunch of 'em draped in the snags and trees.

As luck would have it, I just went through the trees. We had a pretty strong wind at your back and I just went below the canopies, but through them. I didn't go down from 'em, I was kinda coming out of that fairly light angle into it. I remember lookin' right over it, almost dead level with me, there's a Cave Junction guy on his let down rope hanging down. I just remember thinking [laughing] thank you Lord, you know. There was retardant planes going and planes dropping stuff. That was my third fire jump. I have to admit, there was one, when I saw all that, I remember thinking that, I was still a little unsure of myself, I was saying well, maybe this isn't my line. This looks like it's gonna be pretty hairy. By the time I got on the ground, it was fine. Two, three guys on our crew got hurt, a couple of guys from Cave Junction got hurt, cargos hung up. It was a real mess.

BB: Did anybody get hurt seriously?

BH: Broken ankles, couple of three Forest Service trucks on the fire got burned up. It was a real—

BB: How many acres did it turn out to be? Do you know?

BH: It was probably over 500 acres. It lost a lot of steam at night but, what it did, it just burnt like crazy during the daylight hours.

BB: That was in 19—

BH: '69

BB: '69. Did you have any buddies that you hung out around with a lot at Redding?

BH: Yeah , pretty much all of 'em, but my best friends were Gary Johnson, he said he just got back from an interview a few minutes ago and he's now the foreman at Redding, and a guy named Scott Warner who didn't make it to the reunion. I ran around with him quite a bit, in fact

him and I fished a lot together in '71 and missed all the fires. They're about my two best friends. But I was friends with everybody pretty much, but those were probably my two closest friends. I had a lot of other guys that, ya know, I talked to just as well as anybody else, but they were probably my best.

BB: Do you remember any incidences where you were close to being injured or have you been injured pretty bad?

BH: No, I was really fortunate. The only case where I could have been really injured bad was my first fire jump in Region 5. I jumped on the Klamath again, we do a lot of our business there. I burnt out through the trees, I came down through the trees and never hung up, but just drug through the branches which didn't hurt me. I thought I was gonna hit pretty hard cause it slightly deflated my chute. I came down with my back to the river. That's what I was afraid of, I thought I was gonna land in the river. Ya know, it'd be pretty easy to drown, getting tangled up. The water was so deep that I didn't know where the river was to me. As it turned out, I lit right on the edge. I don't know if I lit with my toes on the edge of the bank or what, but I no sooner hit and I fell over backwards...about eight feet down and right on the river rock. Luckily your pack tray is a fiberglass board, but I still had a bruise on the small of my back. It wasn't really that painful but it was definitely a bruise. I've always thought that's probably as close I've ever come to being hurt very bad. You know, it was scary. I made two fire jumps in Alaska with trees that weren't any taller than 50 feet in 100-acre meadows, even though I didn't hit them [laughs], but pretty easy than it was in California where there wasn't a jump spot. They just dropped you where the trees were the smallest. In that area that meant the trees were, where we jumped, the trees were 80- or 100-feet tall. That was as small as they were, as short as they were.

BB: So, did you get hung up a lot then?

BH: No. That was another thing that I've wondered about. Did I not get hurt from skill or did luck? I guess it was just, in all fairness to myself, a little of both. I've never hurt, and I've hung up twice, one of 'em on purpose, the other one...I've been told is choosing and coming. One minute I was there and the next minute I was hung up.

BB: Is it hard to get down out of a situation like that?

BH: No, it shouldn't be. You're trained real well to make letdowns. What's hard is getting back up the tree. You have to put on climbing spurs and climb back in the tree. Some people don't like to climb. In fact, that ruins some peoples' whole careers. They can't get past the climbing. You know, they're not afraid to jump out of an airplane, but climbing back up in a tree with spurs and a rope keeping you on the side of the tree, I've seen really unnerve people to the point that it kinda ruined their whole experience. You could tell that once they hung up that it just ruined all the time they were, you don't get to climb the tree until after the fire's out so they spend the whole time on the fire dreading having to go retrieve their chute. That never

bothered me. In fact, I still climb on the district for people. So I guess that was something else.

BB: What was the atmosphere like in the plane when you would be taking off for a fire? What was it like?

BH: Usually pretty jovial, especially McCall. Now there was a guy at McCall, those guys jumped for years and years and it was really lighthearted there. At Redding, it got more light hearted as the year went on. You know, the first year of course, you're kinda scared and nobody else'll admit it. By the end of the year, you talk like you've been jumping for 20 years. [laugh] But then with that, in that case, they figure well I've only got a few more jumpers, and then it'll be winter and I can go back to the district and tell stories about it. So people are probably overly confident. It's usually pretty jovial. It was pretty lighthearted usually. When you circle the fire, it gets pretty serious. Everybody's trying to look out the window and decide what they're supposed to do, where they wanna land.

BB: Did you have very many hikeouts, long hikeouts or anything like that.

BH: Yeah, quite a few. The trail system is R-5 probably isn't as good as it is in Region One. They certainly weren't into flying out with helicopter unless it was really handy. So we had quite a few. That's probably the dirtiest job of the jumping is hiking out. It's certainly the hardest and you're already tired.

BB: How about heli-jumping? Did you have any heli-jumping?

BH: I knew how to do it. We did practice ones, but no actual jumps out of a helicopter just except practice.

BB: What was that like?

BH: Well, it just seemed really strange because you knew that where you would actually make a heli-jump, when you made a practice one it was down on the lawn in eight feet, but if it was a heli-jump out on a fire, you'd probably be jumping in the brush. We didn't take it very seriously because it didn't seem really like it had much to do with anything.

BB: So it was about eight feet that you just had to jump off.

BH: Eight to ten feet. It could be higher. If you're jumping into brush and it was green stuff on the ground, they might even jump you higher. It just all depends on what was there.

BB: So while you were jumping, they didn't utilize that?

BH: No, they thought heli-jumping was really gonna be the thing to do for a few years but it kinda died a slow death after a while.

BB: Tell me a little bit about the...comradery Was there a lot of comradery between you and your friends?

BH: Yeah. We had newspaper reporters come out a couple of times. They'd write an article, and they'd use that term, you know, comradery. I don't think it was quite the way they painted it. But yeah, just the idea of working with the guys, that's what I really liked about jumping. That was the part I missed. Was that, how you were thought of in the organization and your social ranking and there wasn't that much of it. It kinda dealt with how you performed on a fire. So if a guy was a goof off or something, he was kinda ex-communicated somewhat. If you were in the inner core, everything was fine and dandy. Even the guys that were kind of ducks were included. It was pretty tight. You know, the old going down to the Park Hotel and the Oxford and all that. That sorta thing. Just all part of it.

BB: How do you feel about military attitude? Do you think that the smokejumper organization was ran with that kind of an attitude?

BH: No. Bob Kersh, the loft foreman, he was an old Marine, you know, of course, the military did have a, it was recognized as a good way of training in this sort of circumstances. But no, it was a, in fact they said that, I don't care you could have two- hundred military jumps. It wouldn't make any bit of difference in the Forest Service. If there were any similarities, it ended after training cause jumpers are notoriously loosely organized especially on fires, cause you know, two- and three-man fires, six-man fires. But no, I never saw it anywhere. I really didn't see it at all. And there were a lot of ex-military jumpers there.

BB: They're vets from other services?

BH: I never did see it playing any sort of a part in our attitudes.

BB: I think that's a good place to stop for right now.

[Break in audio]

BB: So why don't you tell me how you feel when you see smoke on a hill, since it's been awhile since you've been jumping. What do you feel when you look out a window and see fire on a hillside?

BH: Well, I've been away from it for so long. I don't think about it every time on a fire. In fact, I hardly ever, when I see it [smoke]. But if it's a small fire out of the way from the roads, of course the first thing I think of is, boy it'd be neat to be on that one and jump that one. But what I think of mostly in relation to jumping is that R-5 doesn't do that good of a job selling the jumper program to the districts and the forests. Usually what I'll think is, you know, they really should use jumpers on that one. That should be a good jumper fire. That's what I think of it.

That, unfortunately, I've been away for a long enough now that I'm not putting myself as one of the jumpers like I used to. At first, I would gee, I'd wish I was there. Now I just they ought to jump that one, which is unfortunate.

BB: Did you do a lot of smokechasing, going out where you were dropped far away from the fire and have a hard time actually finding a fire?

BH: No. I remember one fire we ever had that was hard to find. It was just because it was up on top of a real flat ridge. It wasn't putting out much with smoke. We tried to pick as many landmarks as we could before we got down on the ground. There was no smoke coming up. We just literally wandered through the brush for hours and finally we stumbled on it. That was about the only time I ever had a hard time finding a fire. Usually we were jumped real close and there were plenty of landmarks. But on that flat ridge up there it was rough.

BB: How do you feel that smokejumpers get along with ground people?

BH: When I jumped for McCall, we hardly saw the ground people. If you had it, you had it until the very end. Or they would come in after you. We saw them a little bit. In California, we saw them a lot, always mixing. We called pounding fires just where you truck into the fire. There, for some reason, the ground pounders as we called them, [laughs] maybe that's why they didn't like the idea cause we called them ground pounders. I think there was, and even not only on the district, they have a pretty good attitude. For years and years, and I still think they think this somewhat, they think we're above them all. But that's about it. They all have their stories that they can remember when that crew of jumpers came in and how they really screwed up. But all and all, it's at least passive. You know, they're not really anti-jumper. They're not really real pro either.

BB: Did you get to work with many interregional crews, the more hotshot crews?

BH: Yeah, quite a bit. Now there's a lot of hot shot crews in California. But I've lost track of which ones were inter-regionals anymore. I know Redding is and there's a couple in southern California. The rest of them supposedly didn't have that interregional status but they were all as good as their foreman, so to speak. We weren't as good fire fighters as they were, as far as line building. I think, on an individual one on one basis, we were probably better cause usually we had more experience. You'd be a hot shot, unless they're going to be a foreman, they'd do it one year to get that hot shot experience and go on to, I won't say a cush job, but a better, probably a job that was a little easier on them. But they could build line a lot faster 'n we could. We could even work our tails off together. But they were trained. You know, that's all they do is to build a line...around a fire.

BB: How about rescue jumps. Did you ever get involved in any rescue jumps?

BH: No, I sure didn't. We don't have a lot of them. But I've got friends who've gone on them

while I jumped and since after I've jumped. But I never was involved in one real close. I remember when a helicopter foreman on the Six Rivers was decapitated. I remember some McCall jumpers went on that, had to pack him out. In fact, one guy had to carry the head up. they said it was not real pleasant.

BB: I bet that was an awful one to go out on.

BH: Yeah.

BB: Tell me a little bit about your equipment. What kind of planes did you usually go into?

BH: I started with DC-3's. We had DC-3's at Redding, a DC-3 I should say, and a Twin Beech. And then in McCall, we were Twin Beeches again, the Dougs again, and a Twin Otter, those turbo aircraft. From '70 on I was always around ...see how my memory's failing, I don't remember. In '71, there weren't any Otters at Redding. When I got back to Redding, it was still DC-3's. But I've jumped out of the Caribou, which is a twin engine rear exit plane. That was in '72 and '73. I jumped out of the Twin Otter and the Twin Beech and the DC-3. Those were the only jumper aircraft I ever actually jumped out of.

BB: Did you find a big difference between the planes?

BH: Mm hmm. Yes. In fact, talking about the Twin Beech, you asked me before about memorable jumps. I had a little recall. I had my first, about three jumps, out of the DC-3. I even was first man out the door. But ya don't have to make the exit out of the DC-3, you don't have to actually stick your head out the door. You can just kinda be back a little bit. But out of the Twin Beech you have to, ya know, step and ya have to get your legs out. So you're just right there, looking right at the ground. I remember I felt real good about it. The squad leader recognized me as a young guy. I guess he felt compelled to say this. He kinda pulled me back in away from the door a little bit, just a moment before we jumped, he said, now don't be afraid. You'll be ok. You're <loin' fine. And then I was uptight. [laughter] But uh, we jumped a lot out of the Twin Beech in my first two years then they did away with them.

BB: Why'd they do that?

BH: I think it was pretty much safety reasons. They didn't have a very good ...they had some problems. I forget where. They had some planes losing one engine. So they decided that a plane had to have certain one engine capabilities which a DC-3, they decided, had. They did some tests but it could lose an engine at that critical altitude just after take-off and still make a loop around and land. I guess the Twin Beech couldn't cause they stopped using them. But it was a fine airplane for jumping, quite a few fire jumps out of it actually.

BB: What about your chutes?

BH: Okay, I started with a C-5. That was just a straight...just a parachute that had been used for a long time. Then I guess it was in '71 or '72, we were introduced to a modified military chute called a T-10, which was slightly conical, you know, the edges tucked under a little bit. It turns faster and your descent was a little quicker. We used them and I know Del Catlin at McCall said all along that they were unsafe. Just a couple years ago they stopped using them because they really took a real long, long look at their accident frequency and decided yeah, they must be. So they stopped using those.

BB: Who was the guy you just mentioned?

BH: Del Catlin, he started jumping in '46 at McCall. He was the foreman. He's retired now, he's a real old timer, a real nice man. He was the foreman when I was at McCall.

BB: You enjoyed working with him then?

BH: Um hmm. I didn't agree with his...he wasn't a very strong supervisor at all. He let his, which I told you there were some problems there at McCall, a little bit, supervision in which I got mixed up in a little bit. I thought I had...a good rap, so to speak. But he let his ...he wasn't a strong supervisor. From that, I didn't like him in that respect. I always held all guys that'd have a lot of jumps and a lot of fire jumps in real high regard. Ya know, they were pretty much elevated as far as I was concerned. And he was a real nice man. I really liked him.

BB: But you didn't agree with his supervision?

BH: No, I was just used to stronger supervisors. And that's not in, people in R-5 are any stronger supervisors that in R-4, it's just that Del just wasn't, I mean you didn't see him that much. He didn't have that much to do with ya. Dick Tracy didn't at Redding either. But he looked after his people that were lower 'n him, under him. But still you felt his presence a lot more 'n you did Del's at McCall. Del is certainly a great jumper. I don't wanna slight him in any way, ya know, really slight him.

BB: Do you recall any time when the smokejumpers got in any kind of trouble, that you were out partying a little too much?

BH: McCall, not really. You know, there'd be, you guys are making too much noise and that. At Redding, they had some pretty wild parties. I can remember a food fight. Everybody'd say "animal house food fight" in the barracks that involved watermelon. There was watermelon stuck to the walls. Then later that night some guys got on the hood of a car and drove around in the Forest Service complex shooting rabbits off the hood of the car. I'm surprised they didn't get jailed. Dick Tracy started to bawl us out the next morning. He got so mad that he just left the room. Pretty soon one of the other guys, who was a veteran and a real hard guy, a real athlete, came in and we just ran a mile course for several hours, stopping doing push-ups every

once in a while. Yeah, he was so mad he couldn't talk to us...which he should've been. I wasn't involved in the shooting, but sins of the crew, so to speak. We were all involved, between the food fight and everything else, we were all implicated.

BB: Is there any changes in the organization that you've seen from when you started until when you quit?

BH: Well, strictly from the organization standpoint, yes. Because when I first started at Redding, there were only 22 people and only had two squad leaders. Redding was always...R-5 I don't think ever really supported them. It wasn't until safety first, or a big safety study of the region was done, when they decided you need to have proficiency jumps and better supervision, more supervision and more squad leaders. So all of a sudden we went from a crew of 25 jumpers and two squad leaders to several more squad leaders. Then they upped the crew. So there was a squad leader for every 45 people. Plus, you had the squad leaders in boot, one for about every six jumpers. That was actually a pretty big organizational change.

BB: What about your overtime policies? How did you feel about those?

BH: Well, they were pretty much unwritten, they were your standard policy. At Redding, you were so out of touch with everyday district life that you knew about time keeping. But we weren't really all that well educated on it. We just did our time. It wasn't 'til my last part of my career that the regional really started looking at time slips. We didn't abuse them by any means. But now after the fire's controlled, you know, you're supposed to hold your time under 12 hours. Eight times out of ten, you did anyway after you said it was controlled. But before then, you just didn't pay any attention to it. Now if you had a controlled fire and you even start hiking out and you get over 12 hours, you gotta sit down and plead your case. Usually guys told us to hike out and it took us and long time, blah, blah, blah. But in those days, you just put down your time. and nobody looked at them that close. But it got a little tighter as time went on.

BB: How about the change in burn policies? Did you have any feelings about that where now they have the, more or less, let-burn policies in wilderness areas?

BH: Well, that's a result of land use planning which really didn't come into effect 'til after I left the jumping. But the only place I saw that, excuse me [coughing], was in Alaska where they divided the state into three, or, five areas. One of 'em was modified. About two of 'em were modified suppression ...zones, and of course we didn't like that, [laughs], because we didn't seem to get as many jumps. But we didn't seem to get into the logic too much. Nothing passed that, ah let 'em put it out. I think that was all overtime behind it.

BB: Um hum. So what kind of person do you think does it take to be a smokejumper?

BH: Well, I've gone back and forth on that. You know, I look at all these really old timers. People

are much more aware of their bodies, their lifestyles, I believe than they were in the 40's and 50's, especially in the 40's and 50's. Ya know, in the 60's people really got into that. So based on all that, those jumpers were maybe better. They probably had more grip than we have now. I don't think it takes anybody special at all. You know, figuring that the guy's not afraid of heights. Anybody that's capable of hard work and wants the hard work. I think when I was in it, and it probably hasn't changed that much, you had to like to sweat, like to work hard. I think anybody's that gonna be successful in fire fighting, in forestry has to be somebody that kind of enjoys getting up and getting dirty and then being able to go back in, tell stories, or not even tell stories, but go in and look back on it and say that was really neat. I really enjoyed that. Because if you don't get your strokes out of that part of it than all you're doing is gain' there and getting dirty and tired for nothing, you know. For fairly lousy pay. So, I think that you have to love it in the Forest Service, more than most jobs.

BB: How do you feel about women entering smokejumping? How do you think you would like to work with a woman smokejumper?

BH: Well, sometimes I think I'm a chauvinist. But only from the standpoint that nobody likes to have anything rammed down their throat. I don't know what it is in the other regions but right now there's a, it's called concitary, where a lady working for the Pacific Southwest Experiment Station filed a class action suit, I'll make this real short, against the Forest Service, saying she was discriminated against. I don't know any of the details. The Forest Service settled out of court. They decided they needed parity in the Forest Service both in the GS rates and numbers. So, when it gets right down to it, it's like the quota system where in twenty years it's supposed to reach forty-three percent of the work force in the Forest Service in Region Five is supposed to be women.

To do that, of course, that's a pretty big task. To do that now, they have to create ways for them to meet that. So they have to make bridge positions because right now, in a lot of respects, they can't get there from here in the amount of time they want. I mean some of these thresholds they have, so they're having to create positions so they can get from here to there. The numbers, I think, are unrealistic. But whether it is actually or not, I feel it's rammed down my throat.

Now, I wouldn't have any problems with it just as long as they make sure that everybody understands what the rules are. Because you can't expect you know, there were girls that passed me up in the 10-meter run today. Just as long as you know what's expected. If they're gonna change rules, let's do it. But I'm talking weight wise and the amount you have to pack out, just as long as it's clear to everybody why you're doing it and hope they don't just change standards for the sake of changing standards. Now just like a law, if there's a bad law let's get rid of it. You know, if there's a bad requirement, let's get rid of it. I've always felt with discrimination that they try to heal the social ills too quick. If I was a minority seeing poverty, I wouldn't look at it from the way that I would want too much too fast, maybe that it should take a little time. I wouldn't have any problems with it just as long as she wasn't there...as part of

management's direction, so to speak. And you see that. They saw that happens with Indians. They saw what happened with black people. The pendulum swings back and forth. I've lived through those so I'll live through this. [laughs]

BB: Do you feel that your training as a smokejumper has influenced you? You say you've worked 14 years now.

BH: I like to think that, whether it's true or not I'll never know now cause since I was a jumper but, I like to think that it was my guiding light. I feel that what I am in the Forest Service now is very largely due to my smokejumper time from the perspective of the work ethic thing. I'm kinda relating back to that questionnaire that was handed out yesterday, that people filled, which I didn't bring. I tried to write it down yesterday when I got back from the party. I just fatigued out and didn't get it done. But yeah, I think it really had a lot to do with it ...cause I was really young. I was probably a little immature for my age, for years. I hope I've caught up now. I was pretty much directionless. I started the Forest Service just on, not on a fluke but cause I'd always wanted to be, one, and I got into jumping because, at the moment, it seemed like the right thing to do.

It turned out I liked it. Once I got into it, I really liked it. Some of the things I liked about it, and there were bad things about it, was that being judged on how you performed individually, and not as a crew, but individually. Like on the hotshots it tended to be more of a crew effort which makes them successful. It's really what they do. I liked being able to work hard and say, hey, that was good. You guys really did good, or you did good, and I liked that. There's been a lot of jumpers in Region Five, just like there are in R-1. Once I got out I was very proud. I had a real professional attitude. So I thought it was kind of a standard to live up to. I didn't want to be a smokejumper and end up it being for the rest of my life. I felt I had to kind of live with their standards wherever they were. Ya know, it's just be to do my best.

BB: So do you regret leaving the smokejumpers then when you did?

BH: Well, I'm a good believer in not looking back. I had such a good time. Let's put it this way. Now that I've done both, I think I could've been happy. At least I hope I could've. If I hadn't gone to the district, it's a hard question to answer. I didn't have that district experience before I went. I was just a jumper. I didn't know how to do any everyday district things when I finally go to a district. I enjoy my work now. When I look back on the jumping, the only thing that keeps me is believing you can't go home. I do kinda regret it though.

BB: So out of your career with the Forest Service which do you feel was the most important then?

BH: The jumping. Jumpers hire jumpers. So I've worked for jumpers most of my career too which has helped. It's really helped.

BB: So that's comradery coming through again.

BH: Um hum. Oh yeah...the old brotherhood but then again, you kinda just fit. Most of the successful jumpers that have gone on to become FMO's, you can kinda figure what they expect out of you. I've never felt I had favoritism from them. It's easy to say. I realize that still...I don't think there's been favoritism. There's just a lot of them have gone through and become successful.

BB: Being out for a while do you think that anything's changed, the attitudes have changed with the smokejumpers now or from when you were there?

BH: It's just been a refinement of the changes. When I just left, I read in the questionnaire about, as an example they gave, about that attitudes question, you know, World War II vets coming into it. There was another change when they started leaving, being replaced. When I first started jumping, you were jumpers, you were professional. You tried to do a good job. But as we got into the late '60s and early '70s, people really got into the physical fitness craze. That's about the time it hit the jumpers too. Where we used to go down to the hideaway and talk about whatever, people started subscribing to Runners World and people really got into physical fitness. I was one of the, at Redding, myself and Gary, were probably the first two guys to really start taking it seriously and start recommending to our bosses that we start running more and further and that we have to have a physical test which was a requirement. In the '70s, they started, the bases started looking at more of a physical fitness test than they had before and to get a little more uniform between the bases, at all the bases.

The jumpers started going through a real physical fitness craze which I think really helped them. I saw a study a few years ago where they rated all the different Forest Service fire fighting crews in Region One. They gave 'em all the same test where the jumpers were the most physically fit. And I think there some reason for it. But that was the big change I saw. There were two changes. One was the physical fitness which I was into at the time, still am I guess. The other thing was that, you'd kinda swing with the old Forest Service pendulum, costs, if that's the way they're working, had gone back to, because of the job market. Redding went from a base of just district people to a base of professional smokejumpers who'd be back every single year.

The plus was that there was more continuity to the crew, the accident rate probably went down, they were more physically fit. You didn't have to do so much training. The minus was that they were really out of touch with the districts which I know is a problem here at Region One I think and is more of a problem now in Region Five. They have guys who are so removed from the districts. When I was there, the first couple of years when people were fresh off the district, you know, they'd say, well, this is my district. We got to do good. Not that you don't always do a good job, but they're a little more in tune to the district needs. It's kind of stayed that way now. You've got professional smokejumpers at every base, not guys jumping one or two years. Now you got guys jumping 8 and 9 years. That's completely different.

BB: How old were you when you left?

BH: Ah...must've been 23 or 4. I started in 19—

BB: What was the average age of the jumpers for that time span, do you know?

BH: When I first started, it was probably 25. I remember when I started most of the district guys were 26. The college guys couldn't be older than 22, most of them. But they were at least 20. Now I would say that it's way up in the 20s again. There's guys who've jumped who are much older 'n that. Then there's some guys that are, you couldn't jump after 40, period when I first started. Now as long as you can do the test, you can go. So there's guys in their forties jumping. Not a whole lot of course but there's a lot of guys in their 30s. I don't know but I would guess that the average age could be real close to 30. Maybe it isn't. But I know it wasn't that a few years ago, it wasn't close to that. It's just that professional...

BB: Do you think that would have an effect on the overall output of a crew like that?

BH: It could. The big problem with jumpers in Region 5, I think or, a problem was that they're out of touch with the districts. They're just there, they don't sell themselves to the districts enough. Without that continuity that they used to have on the districts, they're losing a little touch. In that respect, it's a minus. The plus side is that you have a more professional smokejumper that's more likely to get onto the fire without getting hurt. And probably a better fire fighter, at least while the fire season's usually on.

BB: Well, do you have any more stories or any other interesting fires that you can remember??

BH: No, everyone of them was almost a story, that I can remember. The only other one I really remember was a fire where we hiked for eighteen hours. They mis-plotted us on the map. You're just looking at a district map that doesn't have any topog lines. You're just placing yourself by drainages, you just kinda take their word for it. It turned out, they plotted us on the main creek, but we were on a tributary of that. So, we had an 18-hour hike. We didn't know it at the time ahead of us. There were three of us. One of the guys...two of the other guys threw away the flashlight batteries and we didn't take much food with us. I was the only one with a light that worked. We had gone a half mile and one guy sprained his ankle really bad. So we ended up taking about a third of his load apiece. So we hiked for 18 hours, and stuff was damp, so we had almost 150-pound packs for 18 hours.

We just literally feeling our way along cause when it got dark we gave the light to the injured guy, he went on ahead. We didn't really like him all that much. But we figured the best thing we could do for him was to let him go on his own pace and not waste our strength just pokin' along, and went on ahead. I remember a couple times, we thought we were on a trail but we were following little washes. You know they look like trails in the moonlight. It took us, I'd say,

18 hours. We were definitely thrashed.

Or another fire we were on the Klamath. All my experiences are on the Klamath, which is where I worked for five years after that, a fire that we didn't have any trouble holding the top but it was so steep and the rock was so shaley that as the duff got burned away from it, the rocks rolled. I can remember literally hiding behind trees and making mad dashes for the next tree. After we left, and one guy broke his leg, cause our fire packs burnt up on him, on the fire. They dropped the cargo into the fire so they got burnt up, so we didn't have enough lights. The one that didn't have a light had a rock hit him in the lower leg and busted it. But even after we left, we built a helispot. There were eight of us, eight more district guys came in. And after we left, we came back two weeks later, the fire wasn't out by then. But the fire probably got twice as big even after we'd left and they had three times as many people. It was a horrible fire. Then we had to come back four weeks later and retrieve cargo out of the trees.

BB: Do you remember where in the Klamath this was?

BH: Yeah, it was a little fire called the Bear Fire across from Indian Ridge right out Happy Camp. It was a pretty memorable fire. It wasn't what you'd call a real hot fire, it was just the fact that you couldn't control it. You couldn't stop the rocks from rolling down the hill and it carried the fire down. The fire just went straight down the hill. But it was one of those fires, when you got off it, everybody on the crew, you really felt a lot closer to cause you could see how they operated under real adverse circumstances. Because, like I say, we didn't have lights. Water burnt up. We were way undermanned. One guy broke his leg. Another guy got banged up a little bit. We didn't have a chain saw cause it was 200 feet up in a tree. We didn't have climbing gear.

BB: What happens to these guys that get hurt for the rest of the season?

BH: Well, if the doctor says that...I don't really know. If the doctor said you're not gonna be with it the rest of the year, I think the jumper's just carry him the rest of the year if he'd already made fire jumps. It depends on where you are in your training. I've seen guys that got hurt on the practice jumps that came back and jumped later on. But a lot of times if you get hurt on practice jumps and it's gonna be a very long recoup time they just tell you to come back next year. If you look like you're a good prospect, they'll just tell you to come back next year.

BB: Can you think of any other stories?

BH: No, I'm afraid not, nothing too noteworthy. We had a bear incident up in Alaska once where everybody was so into takin' pictures of the bear, the bear had never seen a—black bear had never seen a man before. We were all so involved in taking pictures it finally got mad. An Alaska jumper said, you know, when they hiss like that you know they're really getting mad. So we had to back away real quick. That was about it.

BB: So you got to see a lot of wildlife?

BH: Yeah. I got to see a lot of wildlife. I was real traveled with the jumpers. I went to Alaska three years in a row and New Mexico. In fact, one time when we opened the door at McCall they had the steaks on our gear but they had parachutes on it. And they gave us an hour and a half and I went down to New Mexico. Well, if you don't think that after eating real bland cooked food in Alaska that were cooked for natives. They're not used to spices, they cook real bland up there. Going down to New Mexico covering that much ground, well, if you don't think our stomachs were in a world of hurt. Plus our lips were all cracked. Almost every one of us cracked way open just from all that ground. That was a real mess.

BB: What's the terrain like in New Mexico?

BH: Terrain, it has the appearance of being real low elevation so a lot of sheep grass, bigger pine, ponderosa pine. They told us that the average jump height was around 8,000 feet. There's a lot of rock. The higher you go up, the thinner the air is and the harder you fall. So it's strange in that point. You think the ground looks like it should be real low land. But it's not, it's real high, and it's real windy. It's just opposite from Alaska. Alaska has not much wind and the ground's pretty soft...mostly, as a rule. In New Mexico, it's just the opposite. As a rule, the wind's blowing. You hit real hard cause the elevation's real high. It's hot and dry. But I was real well traveled. I had a lot of fun, an awful lot of fun. In fact, in a reunion like this, unfortunately, it makes me regress too much probably. [laughs]

BB: What do you mean regress?

BH: Just thinking about how it was, maybe how it could have been and all that.

BB: Don't you think that's kinda good though too?

BH: Yeah, mm hmm, as long as you don't trapse back and let it affect your work.

BB: Oh I don't think that'll happen.

BH: No, probably not. But I'm having a real good time here, a real good time.

BB: Well, good. Well, if you don't have anything else to say...

BH: No, I think that's about it. I hope that Gary Johnson, probably got him, we started the same year. He's foreman right now. I'm sure he's got some real good stuff, a lot more continuity than I do.

BB: Well, you're doing good. You have a career to be proud of.

BH: Oh, thank you, thank you. My pleasure.

[END OF INTERVIEW]