Kim Maynard: Maybe you could just say your name and what years you jumped.

John Lester: John Lester and it would have 1960 to '66.

KM: And what was your first rookie training like?

JL: Hot that summer, it was very hot, that year, that was one of the highlights I remember that—100 to 105 every day. It was the hottest summer we had for a long time. A lot of, there were several that didn't make it.

KM: Really?

JL: Yeah, it was just staggering heat.

KM: Yeah, PT and everything.

JL: Yeah, at that time there were a lot of us using canvas suits. They weren't the Nomex type now and, you know, it didn't matter. You went out and climbed up the stairs of the tower and you did all the things you normally did. Of course, your instructor didn't have any suits so they didn't care, but it was a very hot summer.

KM: What kind of training did you? What did you, what did the training consist of?

JL: Yeah, that's a long question, normally, you know, you practice your letdowns and the PT, of course and the tower operation and jumping and after you get through the basic jump training, you went out and did your fire training at that time. Now I don't know if they still do that anymore where they, they would build a little—build fires and you'd actually practice.

KM: Putting them out?

JL: Yeah.

KM: Huh, did you have a packout?

JL: As a training project?

KM: Yeah.
JL: No.

KM: Did...what kind of fire experience did you have before you got into—

JL: Zero.

KM: Zero.

JL: I was still a junior in high school when I started.

KM: Hmm, what made you want to get into jumping?

JL: Oh, I don't know. My father owned a large ranch up at Camel Lake and they used to, they'd jump just off the edge of our property so I can remember it from the beginning of time. I'd lived there all my life, so I'd watched it for years and...I don't remember. I must have talked to Francis, course I'd known him too and about it. And it, it was a bit of a problem that I was, I just would turn 18 four or five days before I'd start and it was one of those marginal things and a couple guys didn't show up so he called me and said, hey, would you like to come 'down? And of course, you know, you don't turn that invitation down. So, it was a fun job in the sense that I was, being in high school it was kind of unique.

KM: Yeah, what was your first jump like, do you remember?

JL: I remember my, the very first practice jump I can remember very good.

KM: Yeah?

JL: Yeah, I saw in the questionnaire, the fire jump, I can't even remember where it was at, the first fire jump.

KM: How about, how about, tell us about your practice jump.

JL: Oh, I can remember that, you know, I can remember a lot of fear and of course everybody is scared, if they says they wasn't, I think they was lying. [laughs] You've been there. If you like to believe it or not but it was the quietness, you know you're out there and all of a sudden, you're all to yourself, there's nothing there. I don't think I've heard that silence for years, you know, just a little wind blowing by and you and there was nothing.

KM: Yeah.

JL: Total silence and it seemed like it lasted a long time, but I'm sure it was the normal 2 or 3 minutes.
KM: Were you the first man out?

JL: Yeah, I believe I was.

KM: Did you have any hesitations about taking the leap?

JL: No, I can't recall ever having a problem. And I... Most of the guys used to talk about more problems with the second man out. But I didn't really care, it didn't matter to me. Sometimes we'd switch, I can remember Buck Pino and some of them hated second man, so we just switched back. I didn't care.

KM: What kind of chutes were you jumping then?

JL: FS-2's and 5-A's, FS-SA's.

KM: Those were 32-foot?

JL: Thirty-two and twenty-eight. FS-2's I believe are 28.

KM: Yeah.

JL: Of course, in that era that was the before the deployment bag. Position was very important because you, when you hit the end of the lines, you got woke up. Not like Francis' days when they used the Eagle and that type thing, but you worked on it hard because the opening shock was tremendous. You always have strawberries on your shoulders for weeks.

KM: Did you ever have a malfunction or get tangled in your lines?

JL: Yeah, I had a total inversion one time.

KM: Did you?

JL: Yeah.

KM: What happened?

JL: Damned if I know, [laughs], my chute was inside out. Of course, the tail's in front of you and everything is backwards, you know, everything's going the other direction. It was a practice jump and it was with... I think Bill Moody was my partner on it. It was in La Grande, Oregon, and we did fine, you know, we got respectively close by, you know, you always—a little pot on who got the closest to the spot and I didn't get closer, but less than 100 feet. So it didn't create a tremendous problem, didn't take long to figure it out, things didn't work right.
KM: Yeah, so you just went backwards—everything opposite?

JL: Well yeah and you know, you're not facing the way you're going.

KM: Right.

JL: It's over the shoulder bit and that was the hard part, couldn't see where you were going.

KM: Uh huh, yeah.

JL: I can't remember, I do remember how it happened and Ted Grout was flying the airplane. We were practice jumping an Aero Commander which was fairly new to the thing at the time, it was, we were just trying it out and it flew fairly slow, and we were going just about as slow as it would go which was down below 50 miles an hour, in that area. It didn't work very good, works better at higher speeds.

KM: Well, you didn't, did you need to pull your reserve or anything?

JL: Oh no, it was completely true, it was completely inside out, and it had a, course a half twisting of lines but other than that it just, you didn't know any different. And I don't know, I'm sure now, by now they've figured out how they get inside out but we, we didn't know then.

KM: Were you ever on a jump with some other malfunctions?

JL: No, I've dropped them with malfunctions as a spotter.

KM: Oh yeah?

JL: I've had a few line-overs and a couple inversions.

KM: Huh, anybody pull their reserve?

JL: Steve White I believe did.

KM: What happened?

JL: Line over, right over the center, more than one, multiple lines.

KM: Yeah.

JL: And I don't remember if he cut any of them or not, you know, you used to be able to cut them. But either there was enough he didn't want to cut them, or he scared enough that just
seemed like the best thing to do.

KM: Yeah and he got it pulled in time?

JL: Oh yeah, it wasn’t a problem. Did great. As far as the danger, there was no danger.

KM: So you don't remember your first fire jump? Do you remember others the first year?

JL: Well, I can remember where a lot of them were, you know, and things and somewhere at home I've got a log on them where they were all at. I looked for it a little bit but didn't spend a lot of time. But yeah, I can remember where most of them were and they're quite scattered because we traveled a lot, you know. In Oregon, I even got over to the Montana country a time or two.

KM: Out of here?

JL: Yes.

KM: Jumped in Missoula?

JL: No, no we went...No, we didn't in Missoula, we come out of Missoula, we ended up actually jumping in Idaho, twice. Lots of it in Oregon, course we had a base in La Grande so we'd take turns down there.

KM: You jumped out of there?

JL: Oh, a lot of times.

KM: The first summer?

JL: Yeah. The Anthony Lakes was a large fire that was down there. I can remember when we, it was kind of unique we, one of those storms had come through and set several, you know, up to 100 fires like in one night. And we'd go jump on a fire and get relieved and you'd ride back in a rig and sleep on the way back and they had a new suit ready for you when you got there so you'd go do it again somewhere.

And I don't remember the acreage on the Anthony Lakes, it was out of La Grande. It was a very huge fire, and we had our choice, there were three small fires and they said, well, which one do you want? So we jumped on one and the other two ran together and ended up several thousand acres anyway, so it didn't, was one of those kind of fruitless things. But if you'd have had enough jumpers, you know, it would have ended up a small fire that didn't take thousands and thousands of acres.
KM: Did they eventually put jumpers on it?

JL: No, it got, they didn't have any, they were out and it ran together. In fact, before we left, we got our little fire out, which was kind of off to the side. We could hear the cats running.

KM: Oh yeah?

JL: And we knew something had gone gunnysack because you could hear the cats running in a day or so?

KM: Yeah. Did you ever do any rescue jumps?

JL: Yeah.

KM: What one...what happened?

JL: Oh golly, you know, I was trying to remember some of the guys that were on them, one of them, that's...it's...Time passes. Of course, we're talking 20 years ago.

KM: Yeah.

JL: Probably the most predominant one I remember was a Supercub that crashed, oh, at Long Swamp, which is between here and Conconully. I don't know if you're familiar with the area here at all.

KM: Not too much.

JL: Between here and Okanogan. It wasn't Forest Service related, we were called in by the Sheriff's department and a particular thing happened to kill one of the guys, and one of the guys it didn't. But you know, I'd like to think we did all right. The one guy went through the windshield that lived, but made a mess out of him of course. And we patched him up and carried him to a place where a military helicopter come pick him up. And the other one was a young kid, and he didn't have a scratch on him but a fire extinguisher hit him in the back of the head.

KM: Oh really?

JL: And you know, it was kind of sad.

KM: Yeah.

JL: But that was the only one, that was the only one that there was a death involved that I can remember being on. Oh, some injured jumper type things, you know or sprained ankles and
hurt knees and stuff and all you do is ready the stretcher bearers, you know. So you end up carrying people out, usually not a long distance.

KM: To a helicopter?

JL: Oh yeah, mostly to a road, most of them weren't that far off.

KM: Yeah.

JL: We didn't have the helicopters then that you use now. Helicopters, we had to make a spot for them and they usually had to be pretty large cause they didn't have the vertical lift they got now. These were like the old Bells, oh, I think they call them G-3's and stuff and they actually needed a semi-runway to get off the ground you know, they were loaded. They could get up and hover you know but it took a pretty good spot. The new ones of course, they can vertically lift a lot more and elevation doesn't effect the new ones. Those above 6,000 feet, they didn't work very good.

KM: Yeah.

JL: So you got carried a lot more than you got, got a ride.

KM: Yeah, huh, let's see here, tell me about any other jumps that you had that first year.

JL: First year?

KM: Yeah, any stories.

JL: Gosh, I wouldn't limit it to years.

KM: Okay.

JL: Because I don't remember the first year in particular. Maybe I was familiar with jumping and my first year wasn't that dramatic to me in the sense that I'd watched it, I knew the operation and had been around it for a long time. It was a way of life for the people that lived here, you know as kids grew up. A lot of the kids—I call them kids, they were men I suppose—wasn't hard to get on here then like it is now. Now you got to go through your fire experience program. Francis was a great person and if he, you know, if he, he knew the community well and if you were an all right guy, he'd make space for you that year, you know. Hiring—I guess you could call it veterans preference if you wanted or whatever, you know? A lot of local kids did get to work here, almost all of them that desired to did so, you know, it was just one of those things, you learned about it before the time actually came. So I don't know, maybe that's why it wasn't quite as dramatic as it might have been for somebody from California or New York or somewhere that had never seen it before.
John Lester Interview, OH 133-058, Archives and Special Collections, Mansfield Library, University of Montana-Missoula.

KM: Totally green.

JL: Yeah.

KM: Yeah.

JL: So first year is hard to limit. I, oh, let's see, I remember at Beaver Lake, which we were, we were in La Grande, Oregon at the time and Beaver Lake is a small, it's a small lake between here and Okanogan on the Loop Loop Highway. And I don't know why, they don't do it that way, I don't think now, but they wanted us to suit up down there. And we would come straight from La Grande to the fire. And this was in an old Beech which only holds four jumpers, and we did suit up down there. However, it was a 2 and a half hour ride so we took them off before we got there, [laughs] and put them back on again in the airplane.

But we could see the fire for an hour before we got here so you, you know, it just, you thought, it couldn't be that one. We ended up, we did jump on it and ended up with several more from the area and that was the only injury I got and I never got it on the jump. I, we got...I was, I guess I was good at climbing trees so I was helping retrieve a chute and the guy pulled on it and he broke the top out of the tree.

KM: Oh!

JL: I sprained by ankle.

KM: You sprained your ankle, you came down?

JL: Yeah, I fell out of the tree and broke the ligament off of my ankle so that put me out for a while.

KM: Yeah.

JL: But it ended up a project fire and there were, ended up, several people on it, and I guess the memorable thing about it which is, was again a unique one is, we called them borate planes, now they call them retardant planes. But they hauled borate, that's what they did, it was the product that they hauled. But are you familiar with it?

KM: Yeah.

JL: Borate sterilized the ground so they have gone on to other things. When the borate plane hit, you might as well burn it because it'd dead anyway. But it was B-2’s [B-2 Spirit], and I was laying there waiting to get helped out and the planes that were dropping, coming right over and this one, in particular for some reason—and of course we never knew why—but I can
remember the roar of the motors, you know, just deafening. And he went slightly behind a hill, and then it went just dead silent, just like he turned it off and he actually...he pulled the wings off the airplane.

KM: Oh yeah?

JL: He crashed, yeah.

KM: What was the problem?

JL: Well, the B-2's ended up not being a very good airplane to do that particular job. They ran severely overloaded and probably, you know, nobody knows, maybe a high-speed stall or something. But he went into the canyon and probably when he pulled it back. It just wouldn't take the stress. I knew, I had known both the pilots. They were from Oregon—the pilot and the co-pilot. But that kind of ended the day in a sad way.

KM: They got killed?

JL: Oh yeah, yeah, just destroyed it. And it wasn't much, you know. I didn't know them personally enough to be involved with them.

KM: Yeah.

JL: It seemed like it lasted a long time, but I'm sure it was a few seconds, you know.

KM: Yeah.

JL: But you could hear the tremendous roar because they’d evidently give it all the power it would handle, and then it just went that sudden silence. And of course, I wasn't working because I was just laying around there eating breakfast and didn't have anything else to do because I couldn't walk.

KM: Yeah.

JL: But the high light of the whole thing, coming all the way from Oregon, suited up, [laughs] jump on a fire and ended up with a sprained ankle and a disaster.

KM: Yeah. Did you...how'd you get out of there then?

JL: I was carried part way and hobbled part way and it wasn't, it was a couple miles to a road so it wasn't a long ways.

KM: Yeah.
JL: That was the only injury I got through the whole career.

KM: Hmm, that's pretty good.

JL: Yeah, I didn't feel bad. I don't suppose I was off the jump list, 2 or 3 weeks maybe and so I felt fortunate I guess. Some of them—I don't know—some of them probably got through with none, we didn't keep tally.

KM: Right. Were you ever on a fire when other people got injured?

JL: Oh yeah, yeah. Sprained ankles seemed to be prevalent thing.

KM: Yeah, from landing.

JL: Yeah, I suppose, yeah. I don't know, you know where I'm, does that seem to be the general trend you've heard?

KM: Yeah, pretty much.

JL: One guy I remember, Carl Johnson hit a telephone line and he got a pretty bad back injury, still bothers him a lot. But when he hit the line, of course, it didn't break, you know. He stood on it for a second or so and then all the chute is still coming down behind you and then it flipped him over and of course he hit pretty solid on the ground.

KM: Yeah.

JL: Which injured him. The, probably the injury, the worst injury and most dramatic I've seen, I was on the Baldy fire which I was crew boss on. That was up in the Boulder Creek area, you could see the fire from town. And a guy by the name of Kleinheksel, a rookie and it was, gee I would hate to guess the acreage, but I had about 15 guys on it probably at the time.

KM: Jumpers?

JL: Yeah and he went in the fire, landed in the fire and it burned him severely.

KM: All over?

JL: No, no it really didn't. I would say, you know again—this is where I'd like to—jumpers are unique people I'd like to believe, I've always thought they were. Kay Johnson and a couple other guys got on the stick and they went up through there and got him out. And really, he ended up with badly burned feet, and that was really the only thing that really put him out of the game. He never come back, he ended up in a hospital for a long period of time and we never did see
him again. He was from Wisconsin, somewhere back in that country.

KM: He...then you had nylon suits too, is that right?

JL: Yeah, he had, well no, it was a Nomex type. It didn't, it didn't burn and actually if he had, you know, panic takes over, if he'd a stayed where we landed, he probably would have come out of it all right. But he got all undressed and tromped up through this thing and it was, it was a crown fire. It was burning hard and he hit right in the front of it and burned his feet—burned his shoes almost off of him. And kind of crazy of course you know it, fear I'm sure set in bad.

We got him out to the edge, and I really didn't do it, Kay Johnson gets all the credit for finding him out in there. I don't know what the, you know, I try to think of acreage, 75, 100 acres. Big enough. It was far aways across it. But a guy who sat down out there and then got his shoes off of him, and he really was in no danger. But of course, the fire would crown a little—you've been there—a tremendous roar.

KM: Yeah.

JL: And it would crown, and it started roaring, it scared him. And of course, he ran off bare footed for a ways with his feet that were already hamburger.

KM: Oh.

JL: And it—

KM: Didn’t do him any good.

JL: Didn’t do him any good, no. So he added insult to injury, but you know, they give us some Demerol and we give him shots and sent us in a crew and we carried him out.

KM: Yeah.

JL: A couple miles again to a road. That was the last weever seen him. Then he went from there straight to a hospital to, they sent him back home for skin grafting and we never did hear from him again.

KM: Wow, just bad chute handling?

JL: Well, I don't know you know. Probably inexperience.

KM: Yeah.

JL: It was a crowning fire that was...I remember Tony Percival was the spotter. He dropped
other people just before that you know, that had made it in all right. But sometime winds are strange around a crowning fire. They, his partner didn't go in, you know, so maybe he went the wrong way for a little too long and the drafts caught him.

KM: Yeah.

JL: And what, you could see it coming, once he got caught in the draft of the crown, he just disappeared in the smoke, you know. And it was right in where the heavy chimney was going up, so you knew there was no coming out because the draft was too strong going in. Once he got caught in that, it was a downhill pull into the fire. But anyway he come out all right.

KM: Yeah, well good.

JL: Yeah.

KM: You being local you don't make as many dumb rookie mistakes.

JL: Oh, I don't know, you know, no I wouldn't say that. I would say it was just—the opportunity was right. Normally I, in my, what I can remember jumping, we didn't hit many project fires, most of them were small. If you hit right in it it wouldn't hurt you cause it wasn't that big.

KM: Yeah.

JL: Two steps and you’re out. Most of them were very small.

KM: Yeah.

JL: So what else, jumps. Let's see, I can remember making a very late jump, I think Moody made one slightly later about by one day, you know. It was always, it was always neat to be the last or the first or somebody to do something.

KM: Yeah.

JL: And it was, I believe 4th of November, god it was late. But I jumped up on the Loop Loop and Tony Percival [laughs] again. He was noted for being the most, I don't know what you'd say. I guess we were disposable. He never brought anybody back, he always took the fire, you never come back. But the wind was blowing tremendously hard, and I'm sure far beyond the limits of what we were supposed to do. And he dropped us and of course we didn't come even realistically close to the spot.

KM: What kind of country were you in?

JL: Oh, let's see, have you been to Okanogan?
KM: Yeah I've flown over, I haven't really—

JL: OK. It was the area between here and there. It was right on top of Loop Loop, almost by the ski area. Moderately heavy pine trees but not, not cliff country, relogged, logged area, and golly, I think Satterfield was my jump partner. But I hit in a, we didn't even, you know, you didn't, we held into the wind all the way, never turned around and of course we could see out jump spot go right by us you know. And of course eventually we kind of, we got down but we hit a ridge or two away. And I didn't remember that it had taken that long so I don't know whether, you know, if it knocked me out or what but I split a helmet right open, split it right in two. And I remember the airplane going by several times, but it didn't bother me, you know, in 10, 15 minutes I was fine.

KM: Huh, really?

JL: And lit there, and the two of us put the fire out. As a matter of fact, it was kind of unique. It was hunting season, of course, deer season was still going on and some hunters thought they'd help us. They dropped the fire pack on the fire so they thought it would be neat to just pour our water on the fire and help put it out, you know. So we didn't have any drinking water.

KM: Oh no!

JL: But the lining was a hard one, probably the hardest I can remember ever.

KM: Just rock?

JL: Well, it was the fact we were going backwards, we probably did about six somersaults going backwards through a, where they had fell a tree and all the limbs were laying there. The tree was gone but the limbs were still there. I can remember getting up out of this pile of brush you know, just junk everywhere and all wound up in your parachute.

KM: Yeah.

JL: But it—physically I don't think, I can't remember that it really hurt me other than they said it took a long time for me to get out of there and I couldn't remember it much but I brought the helmet back. There were just two halves and a face mask.

I don't...I think I made 72 jumps while I was here. Yeah, we're talking about records, that was November 4 and I think about 3 hours later, Bill made a jump on a fire in the same area. Most of these were set by hunters. They got cold so they built a fire.

KM: Yeah.
JL: And he got snowed on, we went out that night but they walked out in a foot of snow so he's, a few hours later and I don't know since if they've ever come up with one that far on in November in this area or not.

KM: Hmm, wow.

JL: We had the best deal cause we got back that night and he didn't.

KM: Yeah, stuck in the snow.

JL: Yeah.

KM: Yeah, huh.

JL: But golly, what else do you want to know?

KM: Did you ever do a water jump?

JL: No, they didn't do water jumps here. As a matter of fact, we didn't, I was, you know, 72 jumps didn't sound like much on today's standards. In that time, of course as a rookie you got seven practice jumps and that ended your practice jump.

KM: Hmm, no more.

JL: No more and as a second year jumper they gave you two and a practice jump was rare, just didn't happen. And so I can't remember, we used to count them up you know and I've got to find my old tally sheet but I was high on fire jumps. I had a, out of that 70 jumps, very few of them were practice jumps, like 50, 50 or better were fire jumps. So we just didn't get practice jumps.

KM: Right.

JL: That was in the era, they were experimenting a lot with the mechanical digger type machinery. They called them Hofco's—a mechanical motor that had a chain on it that beat a fire line. And McCullogh had made a couple that were auger type things that dug dirt and threw junk and—

KM: Did you use those much?

JL: Yeah, we used those a lot because we were in the era of testing them and I got in on that. And I got a lot of fire jumps from that because I was clever with machinery and be able to keep it running. And so—

KM: You packed them out too, huh?
JL: Yeah, that was the sad part. The good part was that I could jump, I ended up jumping the jump list because I went from bottom to top a lot of times. I'd be the last guy in and if it was a particular situation where they wanted to try out some of this mechanical stuff, I might be at the bottom of the jump list, but I'd skip over everybody and get to go with the machinery. Didn't become popular doing that but it was a lot of fun.

KM: You must have been packing out with 145 or something like that once you got all that stuff on?

JL: Oh no, they broke down and they come apart so that everybody got a little piece of it.

KM: Yeah.

JL: The packs, 120 pounds.

KM: That's quite a bit.

JL: Yeah, it's a lot, it's heavy.

KM: Yeah, especially it you're in some of this steep territory.

JL: Usually you get, most of them didn't average over 100. One hundred and twenty was...the old chain saws used to be heavy.

KM: Yeah.

JL: You got the motor on the chain saw, the head part which I don't know, they were 170's at that time and stuff like that. But they were heavy, they really added up in a hurry. So if you got a chain saw and set of spurs or something to bring back, you was loaded.

KM: Yeah.

JL: And of course our suits were heavier too, they were canvas.

KM: Yeah.

JL: So they weighed a lot more than the suits do now and they had, oh a felt type padding in them, it wasn't this foam rubber, Nomex or whatever they call that stuff.

KM: Well, what year did you change to Nomex suits?

JL: Must have been about my 3rd year so that would have been in the early ‘60s. Early ‘60s and
about halfway through is when they went to the deployment bag to get rid of the opening shock.

KM: Were you in on that development?

JL: Well, I jumped a few of them, I wasn't in on any of the testing of it, no.

KM: What'd you think of the change?

JL: Oh, it was outstanding. You didn't see stars after you opened up.

KM: Yeah.

JL: Yeah.

KM: That's good. What did you like about jumping?

JL: What did I like about it. A lot of travel, I saw a lot of country. After I got into the squad leader end of it, I liked to fly, and I know it's totally against regulations but Forest Service pilots that were very gracious to help you out and of course they got bored and tired so got to do a lot of steering. [laughs]

KM: Great. Is that how you got into piloting?

JL: Yeah, yeah.

KM: Did you get your license before you finished jumping?

JL: Yeah, yeah, I did as a matter of fact.

KM: That's great.

JL: Yeah, I owned an airplane before I quit jumping, a small one, you know.

KM: What, how about what you didn't like?

JL: I really couldn't come up with a lot that I didn't like.

KM: Packout.

JL: Packouts, yeah, I didn't mind them. I was married while I was jumping, and my wife wasn't crazy about it because I was gone all the time, didn't like the yelling. [laughs] It's tough on the married people. You've got to have a very understanding wife.
KM: Yeah, I bet.

JL: Or husband, whichever the case may be. I don't know, I really can't of a whole lot that I didn't like about it. I didn't, I didn't mind the physical fitness, you know, I think without question and I'm sure they still are today, that physically I was never tougher. Never. I'm sure a Marine could say the same in his career.

KM: Yeah.

JL: Even after I quit, it took several years for that to wear out you know, because it stayed with you. But what, you can’t go wrong; you’re getting paid to go out and learn how to get tough, you know.

KM: Right.

JL: I'd do it today if my boss would pay me to go do the same thing. But he doesn't, he frowns on that.

KM: What made you stop?

JL: It was a hard decision. I was in the piloting point where I could; I was marginal on getting being able to work with the Forest Service as a pilot. And at the same time my in-laws—we had decided, or they had decided, that the local hardware store, general store came up for sale. So I had a choice of a Forest Service career or self-employment in private enterprise, and I went to the private enterprise. Financially very rewarding.

KM: I'll bet that made the wife happier.

JL: Oh no, she was good, I didn't mean to drag it out like that, but we—you know, first married, and that's tough. No, she used to...she followed me. If I went to Oregon for 30 days, she got in the car and she'd be there in a couple days.

KM: Great.

JL: You know, so it wasn't a bad problem.

KM: Yeah.

JL: But the...I would have to say the background of training that I received here has been helpful all through life.
KM: In what way?

JL: Oh, Francis was a great teacher, great teacher. Leadership, you know, I don't know if I'd of had that without this job or not. Teaching you that nothing was really out of reach, you know. If you really grit your teeth and keep going, you can go a little farther. Responsibility. I think the job requires a, a high amount of responsibility in judgement calls.

KM: Yeah.

JL: And it's something that you retain and, you know. I think I was here long enough that I got it drilled in enough that it just never went away. I think you will look at his track record you know and a lot of other people can do that but the number of people that, who were very successful in life that he actually started out with, you know, and I lived here, but a lot of these guys, they were kids at heart really, came here and he was, he was really their guider for 3 months out of their life you know, in their first job, a lot of kids it was their first job. And got them; he kept them real straight.

KM: Yeah, I bet.

JL: And it had to be tough, he had a tough job you know. About the time you turn 21, you know, booze is the neatest thing ever invented. And most smokejumpers didn't wait until they was 21; they started before.

KM: Yeah, did you ever see any trouble because of that, jumping?

JL: No.

KM: Nobody jumped when they were drunk or—

JL: I didn't say that. [laughs]

KM: Could be pretty dangerous though.

JL: Oh yeah, I suppose, you know. But they were human and, I would have to say they was well under the influence.

KM: I bet there's stories about that.

JL: Yeah, yeah, you know, I can remember one time and I think I, of course Francis didn't, hadn't, that I can remember, did not drink. Although I heard, my father remembers him when he did drink. He wasn't any different than the rest of us. We used to talk about Pool Hall, which is a tavern in town, and I think you could go the whole length of it in three steps.
KM: Oh yeah?

JL: He would walk in and ask us if we were capable of going out on a fire, and of course, we’d been off-duty, you know, so it wasn’t that we wasn’t to be there.

KM: Yeah.

JL: But he couldn't find any bodies.

KM: Yeah.

JL: And—

KM: He knew where to find you.

JL: He knew where to look. Yeah, he could make it in about three steps, and he said ‘Well, you got about 8 minutes to get to the base, pack us up and send us somewhere.’ So we did our share.

KM: Landing could be little bit easier that way.

JL: I don't remember it too much you know as far as affecting it because I suppose in reality and I know physiologically you didn't sober up, but it sure brought you to your senses. When the cold air hits you and stuff, your mind brightened up probably a lot more than you thought you could.

KM: Yeah, yeah, I'm sure.

JL: Oh, what else?

KM: Well, let's see here. Did you see any effects of the Vietnam War on the jump, the whole jumping project?

JL: Okay, I was not a jumper at that period of time. However, I—

KM: Yeah, that's right.

JL: See I have worked here, actually, there probably hasn't been over 2 years that I haven't been employed here in 30, since I started in '61 or '60. I went into flying and I've either, oh for awhile, a short period of time, I flew co-pilot on DC-3 for the Forest Service.

KM: Jump?
JL: Yeah, jump. And then I flew Forest Service recon when they owned their own airplane and then I've flown for almost every contractor they've had that has came through.

KM: Hmm, so you're a regular jump pilot then now?

JL: No, I fly recon, fire recon.

KM: Just, okay.

JL: No, I never, I never did actually fly as pilot in command for the jump aircraft. I flew co-pilot on DC-3 but not pilot in command.

KM: Yeah. Can you recall anything that happened in the air during a, during a jump or, any engines out.

JL: Oh, yeah, you know you could go on forever and they're the same stories that probably a lot of guys have told and on in the sense that they may be spectacular to me but 100 guys did the same thing, you know. Engine out, I don't remember a lot of them other than...No, nothing bad, you know. I can remember a lot of fun, you know.

The pilots were good guys most of them, and they'd go along with something. A lot of the guys here, we went to La Grande, and they ended up with girlfriends or wives or something and a lot of them to college in La Grande. And I remember once, we went down in a Twin Beech, several of us and we decided that, you know, we'd let them know we were getting to town. So they went...the pilot run the prop pitch up, you know, flattened them out. Of course, it...they end up turning a lot faster and the engines make quite a bit of noise and we buzzed the school and we had a lot of people, [laughs] outside before we left. He speeded them up enough you know, the prop will break the sound barrier.

KM: Oh?

JL: And make a horrible racket and I guess it sounded like we went through the school. And we did clean out the schoolhouse. People were waiting at the airport when we got there to see if something was wrong. [laughs] Junk like that you know but all of them have did this at one time or another. And one pilot was going to show us how to feather an engine, going to La Grande and it feathered all right but you couldn't unfeather it so we ended up making the rest of the trip with only one engine. Because he couldn't get it unfeathered. Stuff like that. God, airplane disasters, Kay Johnson and I, and it was out of town here a ways, were dropping fence posts for the Forest Service, like on a drift fence, had nothing to do with jumping. We were just, we used to do a lot of district work when they'd want us. We'd drop parts of lookouts in or watering troughs or whatever they wanted. That was when they owned their own airplane. There was the old Twin Beech, and we had—a steel fence post, of course, has a spade on the bottom.
end—and somehow, we got lodged in one door. But the parachute we always tied to one end, so they'd go down and the parachute got outside, and it was pounding out there and it finally did open and it, one of those spades just went right back through the door and split it right through the tail.

KM: Oh really?

JL: And we didn't notice it too much or think much about it you know. It did damage the airplane quite a bit. Bothered the pilot a whole lot because he said at slow speeds it jerked it real hard and dust just blew everywhere. Every seam in that thing must have scattered the dust out of it. That ended the fence post dropping for the day.

KM: But they were the plane you could repair.

JL: Oh, I'm sure they took it to Troutdale cause the had their own shop you know. It destroyed it for a jump plane until it was repaired because we had virtually cut the stainless steel rim in the door and all the way back to leading edge of the tail.

KM: Yeah.

JL: We tore a chunk out of it, it was gone, [laughs]. You know, probably the biggest fear was getting the cargo stuck in the door with the parachute outside.

KM: Having the chute open?

JL: Yeah. We, you know we'd had it happen a couple of times but it isn't too bad if the chute is on the inside. We got used to drop watering troughs which were ugly big things and you'd get them out in slip stream and it pushed them sideways and you can't move them.

KM: Yeah.

JL: But if you've got the chute on the inside it really isn't a big deal you know, it's dragging along out-there and raising hell. But eventually you work them loose and get them out. But the times that the parachute gets on the outside and starts banging against the side is when you get nervous cause if it opens it's going to take it out.

KM: Yeah right.

JL: It goes.

KM: Yeah.

JL: Oh. golly. Spilt reserves, seen a couple of them you know and that's always terrorizing cause
they slither right to the door.

KM: Yeah.

JL: And rookies don't realize the disaster they're in if it happens you know, cause it never dawns on them for some reason. You end up turning white you know cause somebody finally, somebody will jump on it and stop it. But the draft, it'll suck the damn thing out and of course if it opens, he's gone.

KM: Yeah, huh.

JL: Which it happened in Alaska but I wasn't involved in it. That was always a fear, somebody spilling a reserve.

KM: But you did see quite a few of those?

JL: I've seen a couple spills. No, I wouldn’t say a lot, but they’re sitting in there and of course, the old Beech was a fairly small airplane if you were...were you ever in one?

KM: No.

JL: The Twin Beeches?

KM: No.

JL: You get fire packs, maybe a chainsaw, a spotter, four guys in there, and it was real cozy. [laughs]

KM: Yeah, I bet.

JL: And then you rub against something you know, and you pull the handle out of the reserve and you, the guy that pulled it might not even know it. Of course, the bungees pull the cover back and it, right there on the floor, and it was always a fear. I've seen things lost, where they drop it on the floor and suck them right out.

KM: Oh really?

JL: Oh yeah.

[Break in audio]

JL: Yeah, lost things. The Twin Beech had two little sliding windows in the cabin section for the pilot and the co-pilot. Of course, the spotter always sat in the co-pilot's seat.
KM: Oh, not by the door.

JL: No, going to the fire we always sat up front with the pilot. That's where I learned to fly. [laughs] And I can't remember, it was over by Steven's Pass somewhere. We had left here, wasn't gone very long, I was spotter, checking out the map, you know, because it was strange country, hadn't been there. And Ken Cavin and I had it pretty well figured out where we thought the fire was and the window was open about a quarter of an inch maybe. And we ended up with those two corners of the map. The rest of it went right out through the slot in the window. [laughs] So we thought, you know, who wants to be embarrassed enough to go back and get another map you know.

KM: Yeah.

JL: Who wanted to show their stupidity? So went on over, we knew the country well enough that we felt we could do it. So, big secret, we trudged on and sure enough we could find the fire, you know, the smoke was coming and all that and everything and we, it was in the right area and the right canyon and so we lined up and dropped our guys but it was the wrong fire.

KM: Oh no!

JL: We should have came back and got another map. That fire already had two guys on it and district people I guess were famous. When they'd see an airplane, they liked an air show, so they just sat down you know, and we didn't see them. They were sitting under a tree, and we didn't see there were guys on the fire. So we hit the wrong fire, without the map and I don't know if Lufkin knows that to this day. [laughs] There were a lot of things happened that he didn't know about.

KM: Yeah, I bet. I hear he ran a pretty tight show here.

JL: Yeah, he was tolerable, understanding but an excellent boss. Yeah, yeah, he did, you know. Of course, I never worked under Bill because I—we worked as jumpers together.

KM: Right.

JL: But we, I never worked under him other than a contractor.

KM: Yeah.

JL: But Francis was an intelligent and damn good boss.

KM: Were you ever in, into training like Bill was?
JL: Yeah, I did a lot of the rookie training, you know. The guys would come. And of course, we had our little manual we went through, and we taught them letdown and tower and landings and first aid and that. Of course, Bill has been in it far more extensive than anybody I know.

KM: Yeah.

JL: He's kind of like Francis, he's the expert, you know, as far as knowing what's going on.

KM: Yeah. Any stories from training? I know I've seen just a few in just my short time.

JL: Training—like training people?

KM: Yeah, rookies.

JL: Rookies. Oh, well, you know, they all had their problems. You know, I don't know as...Any stood out among the others because it happened, so many of them happened over and over and it was really dumb, and it was crazy, it was stupid at the time but it happened several times. Guys making a letdown without tying the rope off first, you know. They get it all threaded up, get ready to make their letdown and ready to pop their buckles and tied it to nothing, you know?

KM: Yeah.

JL: Stuff like that. But, you know, it just, I guess it wasn't unique because it happened often.

KM: Right, right.

JL: They only had to hit the ground once and it never happened again.

KM: Yeah.

JL: I would say no, maybe I had a dull life.

KM: Doesn't sound too dull.

JL: Rookies, golly, all of them come out all right that I can remember, you know. Training was always an important part, and I'm sure rightfully is today.

KM: Yeah.

JL: Because if you train them right, they survived and did all right. The ones that were slack and loose were the ones that got into problems.
KM: Yeah.

JL: Physical conditioning, if you're physically tough, you are hard to hurt.

KM: Did you have a test that they had to—

JL: No, we really didn't at that time, like we didn't go through this, the routine of you had to make certain things at a certain time. We had our PT twice a day, and of course, everybody was expected to do it. And okay, I’ll tell you one. You want to hear stories.

KM: Yeah.

JL: They keep coming back here. Warren Badger is mayor of the town now but was secretary at the time. Francis was out here, and we had an old, typical old gray shack, Forest Service compound about 40 years old, and we were doing PT and I can’t remember the guy's name. Warren could, Francis probably would if you'd ask him, maybe he told you. But there was some rookie out there and doing their PT thing, you know, and he had a dog and of course the dog was like most dogs, you'd throw a stick and he'd go it and the dog was mingling among the guys doing their stuff. PT went fine and Francis asked him to come into the office and was very good at leading you on. Actually, you know he said, talked about, boy how smart that dog was. The guy [said] yeah, he really is clever, do a lot, do all these tricks for you, you know. And the guy proceeded to tell him all the tricks that he could do and got all done and Francis wasn’t mad, never cracked a smile or nothing. He just says, well sonny, he says, you got to make up your mind whether you want to be a dog trainer or a smokejumper. [laughs] And that was the end of the story right there. He was always coming across like that with something and was real cool but you knew you’d been had. It was time for the dog to go.

KM: That's pretty good.

JL: Anybody tell you about kicking rocks? His favorite story you know, I mean it, he always talked about a guy when he got fired or couldn't handle it, going down the road and kicking rocks.

KM: No, what happened, he just—

JL: One of the guys he fired, for whatever reason, couldn't make it or whatever you know, and left here, walking to Twisp kicking rocks and that was a typical saying from then on. You’re going down the road kicking rocks—shape up your act.

KM: I heard a little bit about picking up rocks.

JL: Oh, we picked thousands of them.
KM: For no reason. I mean, for something that you did but—

JL: I would say that 90 percent of the rocks were picked probably for disciplinary action and they had an area out here they called Pino Stadium, anybody talk about that?

KM: No.

JL: Okay, it's beyond these trailer houses out here and it used to be all just river rock and you know just, from little ones to 6-inch to 10-inch river rock and you would get to go out into Pino Stadium and work. You grub out sage brush and we took rock over and hauled them over and put them on the riverbank and that was usually disciplinary. Pino Stadium got the name from a guy that spent a lot of time out there.

KM: Oh yeah?

JL: Yeah. So yeah, Pino Stadium.

KM: All right, never had to do an emergency exit did you?

JL: No, no, got scared a couple times but never happened.

KM: Engines going out?

JL: Actually, yeah, you know, coming back from La Grande to here and the weather was crummy and of course in that, I don't know as they do any now but there was no IFR, everything was VFR and we were flying along in the clouds about oh, between Ellenberg and Wenatchee and iced up. One motor iced up, and it kind of sputtered and raised hell. Everybody scrambled for reserves because we used to wear our harness and just have a reserve laying there, you had to put them on and he just barely got that one thawed out and the other one quit so, you know, it was all over in about 2 minutes but nobody, nobody exited. No, I never was on a, never had to make an emergency.

KM: Thank god, huh?

JL: Yeah, that was probably as close I ever came though.

KM: Yeah.

JL: If they'd have both sputtered at once, they wouldn't, those things got a glide ratio of a brick.

KM: Yeah, what would the pilot do, go down with the plane?
JL: I suppose, he's committed to the ride, yeah.

KM: That's a policy now too, right?

JL: Well— [laughs]

KM: Not being an old jumper?

JL: Most pilots had no faith in parachutes, you know, because they'd never used it. Some of the war pilots did, some of the guys, we had a lot of, a lot of guys were World War II pilots when I jumped, still hanging on.

KM: Yeah.

JL: As a pilot, for many years, if I could clear the airplane and I had a parachute, that airplane gets a free ride all by itself, if I had a choice.

KM: Yeah, you wouldn't bring one though?

JL: Wouldn't what?

KM: You didn't pack a chute?

JL: Oh yes.

KM: Oh, you did?

JL: Oh, yeah, yeah, then of course the pilot has responsibilities, I suppose he's like a ship and a captain. Everybody else has got to go or they haven't got a chance, cause, you know, you can make a control landing or it can just flounder and crash. Without a pilot, it ain't going to make a control landing of any kind.

KM: No.

JL: So you've just about got to have agreement that everybody's gone and you're lost.

KM: Yeah.

JL: But I, if that occasion would arise and I haven't made a jump for 20 years, I'd do it. [laughs]

KM: Yeah.

JL: You know the parachute, after you're a smokejumper, doesn't become a problem. Even with
one chute I wouldn't hesitate, it wouldn't take me, I've seen a lot of airplanes and they don't, they hit real hard.

KM: Yeah, I bet. Let's see, any spotting stories about, I mean your doing the spotting?

JL: I always liked to think I was fairly conservative compared to the others. [laughs] No, I didn't hurt anybody that I knew of. I did have a couple, like I say, malfunctions, line overs and an inversion. Steve White had the inversion. As I remember it, you know, it took him quite a while to realize it cause he was going the wrong way. He couldn't have known, he never looked up like they tell you to cause he was, he was not going the right direction for quite a bit of the time. But it wasn't a problem, it was in an open area. It was a fire jump, all of them were on fire jumps. Not that I can remember, didn't have any, you know, no cargo problems.

KM: Nobody hooking up to the wrong line?

JL: Well, of course in the Twin Beech you only had one, see.

KM: One cable?

JL: Cable down, at that time the spotter hooked them up. They didn't hook theirselves, so we hooked them up and put the pin in. And you know, I didn't, nobody went out that ever come back and told me about it that didn't open.

KM: Right, what, what did you do for project work?

JL: Project work, Pino Stadium.

KM: Yeah, you were out there a lot too, huh?

JL: I took my share out there, I, no, I didn't spend a lot of time out there. Did a lot of district work anywhere from building fence to telephone line maintenance, at that time they didn't have radio. A lot, they had a lot of the lookouts had telephone lines to them, so we maintained a lot of that. I spent a lot of time keeping our chain saws and stuff running, fixing them up, cargo and getting them ready to go. So I had a corner on the little house next door. Project work, probably the best project work I had, we made a exhibition jump for Seattle Times.

KM: Oh really?

JL: At that time, it was Satan Primitive are, now it's the wilderness and that was neat to come out in the centerfold of the Seattle Times.

KM: Great, what year was that?
JL: '64 or '65, along in there. And, you know, I guess they justified it by, they were doing away with the lookout, Bunker Hill lookout. And we made an exhibition jump in a Twin Beech and they took the Forest Service spotter plane and he photographed out of it, out of the spotter plane alongside. Then we wound up the telephone line down off the mountain to a airport that was in the primitive area and then they took us up and brought us back out.

KM: Huh, huh, that's great.

JL: So, you could do those things but you had to justify them, you know. You couldn't go making exhibition jumps but you could make a, make the jump because you were winding up power line or telephone line.

KM: Right, get a little PR along the way.

JL: A little PR, yeah.

KM: All right, so most of the time when you were here, you lived at...you didn’t in the bunkhouse?

JL: No, I lived off base all the time, it's cheaper. Money was a big deal then.

KM: Yeah, I bet. You weren't in on the overtime pay either were you, straight time?

JL: Yeah right, everything was straight time. Overtime didn't exist.

KM: Do you recall how much it was an hour?

JL: Yeah, it was in the $4 range. It was good pay for then; it was very good pay. And at the end you know, it might have got up to around $5.50 or $6.

KM: For GS-6, 7?

JL: I got to 7.

KM: Yeah, huh.

JL: Yeah, it might have started about $3.50. God, I could look at home, I've got some old diaries. But it, at the time it was an excellent job.

KM: Yeah.

JL: Good pay. We got...we called it OT [overtime], but it was straight pay. We got lots of it, lots and lots of it, usually more than you could stand, you know. That time I told you about down in
Oregon where we would sleep in a crummy on the way back and they'd have a suit and a chute ready for you to go out. And it almost got to the point where it was ridiculous because you got paid while you were riding in the crummy, because you were on duty. But you almost got 24 hours out of it because you turned right around and left again.

KM: Yeah.

JL: And so you got your sleep on company time riding back and you went back out again, and at daylight the next morning you come back and do it over. And so the paychecks got real big.

KM: Yeah.

JL: Which was, you know, it was extremely, extremely good pay. You put in you duty time but comparatively speaking, there was nothing else around at the time that paid near or close.

KM: That’s good.

JL: I don’t know. How is it now?

KM: Well—

JL: You don’t get the overtime we did. See we got overtime, lots and lots of overtime.

KM: Yeah, they're limiting it at this point.

JL: Yeah, see it was virtually unlimited in the sense that you didn’t, you know, you had to be reasonable, you couldn't get 25 hours because you didn't stop for lunch. [laughs]

KM: Right.

JL: But there were lots of 18-hour days, lots and lots of them.

KM: Well, that's good. And you also, so you did get pay and then eventually you got comp time?

JL: Well, comp time was optional. As a jumper you didn't have to take comp time because comp time as a squad leader or as a permanent employee you could acquire. But jumpers didn’t take comp time because they never stayed around to collect it.

KM: Yeah, right.

JL: They, termination time when school started in the fall if you were going to college or whatever school you were going to. So they didn't really give them, or take comp time. And god, if I remember right, you know, like you didn't have to take time off. I mean you got your
regular 8 hours even though you, if might have got a whole bunch of overtime yesterday, but you didn't have to take off today to make up for it.

JL: You were still back on your 8 hours today, and if you acquired more, well, that's just the way the ball bounces.

KM: Yeah.

JL: Wasn't any hazardous duty pay or anything like that. That didn't exist.

KM: No, right.

JL: So I'm sure there was a normal amount of padding because you was your own bookkeeper. [laughs]

KM: Right, yeah. Did you, did you get around to some of the other bases? You went to Missoula you said.

JL: Oh, I've been, yeah—

KM: La Grande?

JL: Missoula, McCall, La Grande, Cave Junction. Of course, Redmond didn't exist. I was at Redmond but not—the base really wasn't there.

KM: Any good jumps that came out of there?

JL: Oh, lots of them out of La Grande. We spent, we use to rotate, and it wasn't really a choice. They'd give you maybe 2 weeks in La Grande and then they were on a regular rotating bases. Yeah, they took the next top six off the jump list and when it came their turn, they went to La Grande. Which nobody fought because everybody wanted to go but everybody couldn't.

KM: Right.

JL: And there were times for awhile. They'd give you 30 days there; you'd take 30 days in La Grande. And then they tried some of them on a volunteer bases that just stayed there, they spent their whole summer there. And of course, La Grande at that time, there were no bunk houses; there was nothing you know. We slept in a Sacajawea Hotel, and we had an old, abandoned weather station out in the airport that was your place to stay, which you could get about ten guys in at one time. That one, that one was, it was neat when there were fires. It got real old when there wasn't because there was nothing to do, you know, you can only play so much pinochle until it ain't fun anymore. You could play 8 hours a day if you wanted to. You could play pinochle virtually 8 hours a day.
KM: Hmm, no project work down there?

JL: Nothing, they wouldn't take you off the base, and there was one summer one time that we did get a little project. But basically, we were married to that base and we never went anywhere and we didn't own any buildings out there, we didn't own nothing you know, so it was just dream up whatever you could.

KM: Yeah, did you...did they have a base manager for that area?

JL: No, one of the squad leaders would go.

KM: Would go and, go on fires too, huh?

JL: Yeah, normally the same guy did it all. And we had an old hanger there that had a couple tables in that we'd rig the chutes in. A lot of them were sent down because when they rotated, they just bring in a plane load. They'd just bring more.

KM: You were a rigger too, then?

JL: Yeah.

KM: Let's see, did you ever come across any episodes with animals, bears or snakes?

JL: No, nothing tragic, saw a moose and stuff like that, you know, but nothing that—

KM: No wild stories?

JL: No, nothing that was terrifying, you know. Of course, I don't know. Maybe again, the lifestyle wouldn't have created that situation because I always hunted a lot, and it wouldn't have been a terrifying situation anyway.

KM: Right. You never went up to Alaska?

JL: No, I, two times, got in the airplane, but we never got from here to there. That was a thrill then because it didn't happen to you, it was rare to get to go, very rare.

KM: Really?

JL: And you were really something special if you got to go. And they would call, and we'd get ready to leave and we never got off and one time we got to Seattle. That's as far as we got. Sent us back.
KM: They just decided they didn't need you?

JL: Well, either something—a bit of rivalry, Missoula always cornered the market. They went first and they had to be, we were last to go. So it had to be a total disaster or we didn't get involved, and there were a few. And they did start going right after I had got out of the business then we, some of them started going on a fairly regular basis. But that was a very special trip if you got to Alaska. A few got it, but very few.

KM: Yeah.

JL: Now, some of them in that area used to jump in Alaska, and then they'd come back here mid-season, and they actually occupied both bases.

KM: Oh!

JL: Several of them did that. I never did, but several of them did. Their season ended about when ours was just a quarter of the way through or so. So they would jump up there until theirs was over and then immediately come to here.

KM: Get a long season in.

JL: They got a very long season.

KM: Yeah, ooh.

JL: That's when it got to where 50 jumps didn't really mean much.

KM: Right. Let's see here, did you do much in the way of retardant work, either now or—a

JL: No, other than wash it off after they give you a bath.

KM: But you never, worked at it with retardant here?

JL: No, we didn't have a retardant base here. We did in La Grande; it ran out of there. The only thing I did there was, you know, the jumpers got the duty of opening the sack and mixing up the slurry. When they used to pour it in, it come in 100-pound bags, which nobody liked. You ended up looking like a, I don't know what, a zombie of some sort. Other than that, we didn't have any duty in it as far as the actual operations. The airplanes were there, we knew all the pilots and—wasn't supposed to—but occasionally you could get a ride with them.

KM: Oh!
JL: It was kind of unique.

KM: Yeah. What kind of retardant planes were they using then?

JL: B-25's, 26's, PBY's, F-7F's.

KM: Some of the ones they are still using. That's good. Let's see. Did you...did you ever do much in the way of, like jumping into lookouts around here? Jumping in and supplying lookouts or working on them or that kind of thing?

JL: I didn't do a lot, the base did a lot, I didn't get in on it much. Dropped a lot of cargo to them, we supplied them, dropped all their stuff to them.

I remember, OK, there's one, Al Anderson who's dead now, but he used to have Goat Peak which he was there for a long time. And he used to call up and order a sack of oats and that was a fifth of old...of whiskey. We dropped it to him one day and it broke the damn bottle, cracked it, and he sat there and drank it right down the crack, right there. And he was slightly funny when he got back on the radio. [laughs] But that was a bottle of Old Crow.

KM: What did you...you said that you thought jumpers were a unique bunch. What kind of things, what was different about jumpers than about either ground pounders or—

JL: Oh, I guess we, you know, on a, on a district level, and of course now the suppression crews have come on to be pretty tough people too—very skilled people. They didn't, the suppression crew was really a non-existent thing. They used a lot of district personnel that they just threw together and took out.

KM: Yeah.

JL: But on a district we were always treated like kings. Everywhere you went you know, you were OK, within a community. You, I guess you weren't something special but it was just unique to be a smokejumper.

KM: This community?

JL: Yeah, and as people, I think they learned to be good leaders and like I say they ended up either acquired a lot of responsibility or you didn't stay.

KM: Right.

JL: And some of the guys, you know, did stay for a year, some of them stayed for many years and some of the good ones that stayed for a year, a lot of them it was college, a way to make their way through, awful lot of the people here. It was a summer job while they were in college,
after they graduated you didn't see them.

KM: Hmm, they left then towards then end of summer, and you'd have to scrounge around for new jumpers?

JL: Yeah, they always, fall was always a, you know, that's when you'd acquire quite a few jumps because it was short crew. Although we had then... Then we virtually jumped every fire, didn't matter where it was or what size it was. Now they've got the let burn policy has changed it a lot. Golly, what'd Francis say, '44 probably was the, up to?

KM: Yeah, something like that.

JL: See, I was here through that time. We had a lot of jumpers. For this base, that was a lot.

KM: Yeah, would you know what year that was?

JL: Had to be '62, '63 that we, I think, we were always in 30's that I can—I think we were—that I can remember. 30, 32, 33 [jumpers], along in there which is far more than they've had here for several years.

KM: Yeah, right.

JL: So we had a lot of guys. But then too, we were detailed 14 or 15 of those went to Oregon, see because La Grande was a satellite base.

KM: Right.

JL: So some of them got sent down there.

KM: For the entire summer or kept 14 there?

JL: Well, at least there were 14 or 15 down there. They may not be the same guys but there was always that many there. So that, you look at it and that probably absorbed some of it. But at times we were all here. So there were a lot of, was a lot of guys, a lot of bodies to try and keep busy.

KM: Right.

JL: Golly, what year did Francis say it was? It must have been ’72 or so when we had so many airplanes here.

KM: Or ’70, the big fire year.
JL: '70, we actually had a portable tower here and we had a tremendous amount of airplanes coming and going.

KM: Hmm, were you part of that?

JL: Well, I was part of it in the sense that I owned the hardware store. But we supplied them with a lot of stuff. We...I strung the wire out and set the tower up for them and I flew their fire recon at that time. So, you know, I was involved from that aspect, but not as a jumper.

KM: Right, hmm, what was the best part of, what was the best year that you had?

JL: Best year, well we probably counted it in fire jumps, you know.

KM: Uh huh.

JL: If you got eight or ten, you probably did real well, you know. I got up I think 14 one year and that was, would have been an exceptionally good year. I believe that was second to the end which would have been '65. So that would have been a real good year.

KM: Yeah.

JL: We did a lot more work than we did jumping. These guys got it made where they go out every 2 weeks and do a practice jump just to, you know, something to do. We probably prayed a lot more than they did because if we didn't get fires, we didn't have nothing to do.

KM: Even here huh, even here you didn't do much.

JL: Well, yeah, we always had, yeah, Lufkin, you didn't, there was never a time you didn't do nothing. There was no 8-hour pinochle games, I'll guarantee you. They did not exist, or if they did, they didn't exist very long. Yeah, typical, Francis Lufkin, we, he acquired a lot of things surplus. He could make something out of nothing, you know. We acquired a powered lawn mower which was a, that was a real unique thing, a real live lawn mower with a motor on it. Got ingenious and made a little seat that'd set behind it, you know, had some dolly wheels and steer this lawn mower. Really worked very well and he come by one day and it was a typical dog story, you know. I thought, boy that was a real job of engineering and when he got to the end line his comment was that if you don't get rid of that seat, I'm going to take the motor off, and you can push it.

KM: He didn't like the seat too much.

JL: Well, I guess not, you know. We was out here being physically in shape, and he didn’t think
riding a...behind a lawn mower was the way to do that. [laughs] He was heavy on physical conditioning.

KM: Yeah, about how much time did you get for PT?

JL: Seemed like 8 hours a day, but I’m sure it wasn’t. I believe it was 45 minutes to an hour, twice a day.

KM: Wow, that's pretty good.

JL: That's pretty good, yeah, it seemed like forever. It was always two trips around the airport and at that time it wasn't as long, it was a 3,000-foot runway. It was clear around it twice a day, and that's when you cleaned up the guys from the night before.

KM: Right.

JL: They always, first trip around you had to watch where you walked, the party before would be left along the side of the runway [laughs] and that probably kept them in good shape—to be able to make the next party the next day.

KM: Yeah, yeah.

JL: Ready to go.

KM: Right, so what was your longest packout?

JL: Oh, 20-plus.

KM: Really, where was that?

JL: Glacier Peak.

KM: That wasn't with one of those trenchers?

JL: No, no, no, but it was a long way.

KM: Yeah, couple days?

JL: Actually, we made the whole thing in one day. We didn't make it; we stayed all night on the fire. But the packout was made in one day.

KM: One day. Well, that's pretty good.
JL: Yeah it was... wasn't bad. It wasn't cross country; it was a good trip.

KM: Yeah.

JL: There's some of them, you know, I... you can get in the wrong place and 5 miles is worse than 20. We had an area, the Lost River area, which was always tough and Lake Chelan, and god, 2 miles there could be a disaster. Lake Chelan, I think. God, we had a district guy—some of the district guys would jump occasionally and certify,--jumped on fire. And of course, he was senior, you know—seniority on us at that particular time. They had told us there would be a helicopter in to pick us up, but he wasn't on time. And we waited quite awhile, and the guy got very impatient. So he decided, hey we're... hell with this. Helicopter ain't coming. We're leaving. But we got just far enough away that we could hear.

KM: Oh no!

JL: But it was too far to go back, you know. We ended up going down a gorge and actually wading down a stream, you know, to get out of this place and it was 10 or 12 hours later we got out. It wasn't very far, it was only 5 or 6 miles, waded a river over our head. Fortunately, we didn't get him for a jump partner again. [laughs] He wasn't very fond—there were four of us, and we wasn't very pleased with him when we got there.

KM: I bet!

JL: But some of those, you know, you remember I guess because it was, it was hard, it was very hard.

KM: Yeah, yeah.

JL: I can't remember any of them being especially dangerous. That one I suppose could have been. One of the guys actually swam the river and took a letdown rope across, then we tied stuff to it, you know, and we'd shuffle it back and forth till all the gear was across. Then all we had to do was hang on to the rope, go across and just left the rope there, we didn't have to retrieve it, left it behind. Oh, I can't remember, I didn't do too bad a job. We used to hate to hang up.

KM: That was the worst?

JL: That was not a popular thing. Well nobody liked it, you know, they practice it more now than we did but we didn't like hanging up. Two things, you had to get to get the dang chute back and the letdown was never popular. You'd get pretty high sometimes. We used to get in the Gifford-Pinchot [National Forest] occasionally, which would have probably 200 foot trees, old growth stuff, your letdown rope didn't reach the ground, didn't touch.
KM: They didn't give you two 50-foot ropes?

JL: Didn't do it then, no, no. As a matter of fact, now I think they've got some 120's that they can give you, but you better pack your chute up and take it with you because you didn't come back after it.

KM: No.

JL: You had to take it down as you went.

KM: Huh, wow.

JL: That was big trees, you got down there—

KM: Big trees—

JL: Yeah, give us a chain saw to build a fire line—

KM: Yeah.

JL: Wouldn't even reach a quarter of the way through the tree, you know. We got to carry it out but from the practical standpoint, it didn't do much for us. They... lots of trees there were, oh, 5 and 6 foot on the stump so—

KM: Pretty big.

JL: Yeah, just, crosscuts were useless.

KM: Yeah, did you use much crosscuts around here.

JL: Yeah, lots of them.

KM: Much more than chain saws?

JL: Yeah, especially on two-man type fires, you know—two- and four-man where it's just single trees. We did use chain saws a lot too, but usually on the bigger, acre plus type stuff.

KM: Yeah, you were, you jumped with radios didn't you, those big radios?

JL: Well, if we got one. I would say, gee, better than 50 percent of the time we never got one. They didn't have very many.

KM: Right.
JL: Yeah, they were the big, big square, couldn't talk to anybody anyway, you know. You could talk, you and the airplane. When he went away, you was in no man's land. They didn't have any range to them, and they didn't have the repeating stations that they got now and sometimes it was marginal whether you even wanted the damn thing because you had to carry it back, you'd just as soon they kept it.

KM: Right, right.

JL: Unless you were hurt or something you know, you didn't really want it that bad.

KM: No. What about the food that you had during that time?

JL: Food that they had—I'd say it wasn't fit for a dog. [laughs]

KM: Dried or—

JL: Military K-rations.

KM: K-rations, really? Your whole career?

JL: Yeah, almost all of it.

KM: You didn't get into dried food?

JL: No, dried food didn’t exist. I think they called it pound cake.

KM: Yeah, right.

JL: And it had crackers that would sail for at least a mile. They were little round jobs about and 8th of an inch thick, and they would go for miles.

KM: John Wayne.

JL: Yeah, usually had some kind of spam or hash or something that would guarantee indigestion. It wasn't fit for a dog.

KM: No.

JL: And they expect you to work on this, and I...there have been occasions when we'd throw the crackers, one in particular I can remember. Hated the damn stuff you know. You'd think immediately you were going to get relief or something, you know, so over the hill with some of it and we went down and looked for it because we got left there for a long, long time. So, down
over the hill looking for dried-up crackers.

KM: Right.

JL: The carry out program wasn't as bad then as it is now. I can't say that, and most of the people I'd say were very respectable in the sense that we always burned it or buried it. But we didn't have to bring it back so we didn't have a lot of the trash to bring back that you got now.

KM: Yeah right, but we don't, we don't have the cans either.

JL: That's true. Nothing would make me gripe worse than carrying a tin can back. Golly, I don't know.

KM: Any, any other stories you can think of?

JL: Well, one always leads to another, you know.

KM: Right, got to be another one back there somewhere.

JL: Yeah, two times I got to jump on the same fire twice.

KM: Oh yeah? That you left it, or you were relieved from?

JL: We were relieved from.

KM: Thank God.

JL: Yeah, we were damn worried though.

KM: In the same day?

JL: No, no, they were one day apart. Jumped on it one day, got relieved and went back and jumped on it again the next day.

KM: Oh yeah?

JL: And one of them ended up being a large fire, was the Baldy fire and the other one was on Glacier Peak.

KM: Hmm, wow.

JL: So I got to jump on the same fire twice. It really isn't that unique though because it's kind of terrorizing. Who's going to get the blame on it cause there's a lot of idle talk goes on.
KM: Right.

JL: Even though you got that little relief you know, they say, well, you left too early or poor judgement was used or something.

KM: Yeah.

JL: I don't know. Okay, one that I got that not many got and I don't know of anybody here ever got it. We, it was late in the fall and went out in the observer plane, found a fire, come back, put a jump suit on and went and jumped on a fire, and that was kind of different.

KM: Yeah, I guess.

JL: Wasn't far, it was just over Twisp river—a little ways away.

KM: Used to go chasing storms, didn't you?

JL: Oh yeah, rode miles and miles following lightning storms with a—

KM: With a load of jumpers.

JL: With a load of jumpers and rightfully found a lot and did a lot you know. Hell, we'd see them start.

KM: Right.

JL: We got them before they went out. So, yeah, we did a lot of that, it was a common practice. We used to, common practice with jumper patrol they called it, where every night we just went out for an hour on patrol. Just went looking around deer hunting or goat hunting or whatever because there was, if there wasn't any fires, there was nothing else to do but fly along and look for something.

KM: After dark you mean?

JL: No, no, no, no, no— evening duty, like between 6:00 and 8:00 or something, jumper patrol and we just went out for an hour or whatever the designated time was and usually it was in the wilderness. Found a lot of them, occasionally, you know. It wasn't all, all lost.

KM: No, huh. Well, unless you can think of something else, I'm about out of questions I think, here.

JL: No, really, very quiet, cool watch, no problems.
KM: A lot of fun though, that's pretty good.

JL: Yeah, you know it's...I certainly wouldn't begrudge it. I think it was probably the most, biggest highlight of my life, if you could have a highlight you know, something special.

KM: Yeah.

JL: I'm sure a lot of the guys, like the Vietnam War was a big deal to them. I didn't have, fortunately didn't have to go the service in any of the wars and so I guess this would have been my highlight.

KM: Yeah.

JL: Fell between them, I never was drafted. There was mandatory draft and then they just, I ended, I got too old for them, they didn't want me. They didn't draft me, then I got about 24 and when they finally sent the notice out, it really wasn't, they didn't want us. We was too smart, they wanted the dummies that were young. So anyway, I guess, you know, from that aspect, it was, that was my part of my life that they got somewhere else.

KM: Right, huh.

JL: And I would have to have called it a extremely good learning session, which I told you before.

KM: Yeah.

JL: I think the training that was produced here was superior. I can't say superior to other bases. But normally if, in a job you don't expect that kind of training out of it, you don't acquire that kind of training. The district people, I'm sure didn't get the variety that we got.

KM: Yeah, right.

JL: A lot of the people went out of here very successfully into the Forest Service, that I'm sure Lufkin could go directly responsible for it. He went out and actually searched a lot of jobs for us, he would place these guys. He would look, continually looking for FBO's or fire officers or something for guys and he would build them up for that position.

KM: For jumpers that didn't want to jump anymore?

JL: Well that were careering, that were looking for a career and I think he did an excellent job in setting them up. Which would put them years ahead of other people that were trying to work their way up.
KM: Yeah, hmm.

JL: And you know, I can't have enough to say to the man. KM: Yeah, sounds like quite a guy.

JL: He was excellent, yeah, and the Forest Service, I suppose I took good care of him, but they deserved him. They should have took good care of him.

KM: Yeah.

JL: I think a unique thing between now and then, and I think it's something that is sad that it's lost. Of course, he got high in the Forest Service level as far as respect. Even to the Washington, D.C., level and if he made a decision, he usually didn't have to ask too many people about it you know, He had to go the channels and, but he, he did override people and if he felt it was right, there was no limit to it. It happened, you know, and Bill may have that attitude, but he certainly doesn't have that authority.

KM: Right.

JL: And I don't think that they get the utilization out of their personnel that they'll ever get out of a dedicated man like Francis. He certainly contributed a lot to the firefighting situation that couldn't happen today because they don't have the authority to be able to do those things.

KM: Yeah.

JL: He was an aggressive, innovative guy. Always thinking of a new way to do it better, always, so we did a lot of experimental work.

KM: That’s great, he didn't get bogged down in old policy too much.

JL: No, not at all. The only thing they always got bogged down is them damned old parachutes. They would never go to the newer models.

KM: Oh really?

JL: Yeah, the old standby who never fails, but you probably, what chutes have you used?

KM: Just the FS10 and the FS-12.

JL: Yeah, see they would make ours look like, they were like a Model-T compared to a new Ford.

KM: Yeah.
JL: So, you know, several seconds to make a 360.

KM: Yeah.

[End of Interview]