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Interviewee: Cole MacPherson

Interviewer: Floyd Cowles

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Floyd Cowles: This is Floyd Cowles interviewing Cole MacPherson for the Smokejumper Oral History Program at his office on June 21, 1984. Cole, would you provide me a little autobiography of your life?

CM: Yeah, Floyd, I was born in Marinette, Wisconsin in 1935. And in 1951 after having come out to Montana for a vacation we moved out to Missoula, Montana from Fond du Lac, Wisconsin. And the next year, when I was 17, started working for the Forest Service up at Seeley Lake, on district, and I worked for them in '52 and '53, and then [in] '54 I didn't work in the woods; I worked for the McLeods.

FC: What did you do in '52 and '53?

CM: Well, let's see, in '53 I was in Morrell Mountain Lookout. I was up there for 50 days, about an 8-mile walk in there—7 or 8 miles. I guess I saw about five people. It was a long summer. I was up there 42 days before they brought me fresh chow—eating out of the can. But I met jumpers then and got rather impressed with their work and the district wasn't real pro-jumper, however. I worked for Horace Godfrey and Herb Heinle. But then in '54 I did; I was in college. Let's see, I started college in '53, so '54 I was in the end of my freshman year. I didn't starting jumping until '55 and then I jumped '55, '56, '57; graduated in '57, went back to graduate school.

FC: In dentistry?

CM: No, I didn't. I went in wildlife. I was taking wildlife management when...in the fall of '58. Let's see, fall of '57. I graduated spring of '57 then I went back to graduate school. I got my degree in pre-med though, yeah, then I went back for awhile. And let's see, I went into...I worked New York Life for about a year—the year of '58—then I went into the service and put 4 years in with the Air Force. And I didn't go into the flying program which they wanted us to do. I went in...They changed it to a 5-year program so I didn't do that, and I became an explosive ordinance disposal officer—blowing stuff up. It was a neat job. And then I put in tours at ten different bases in the 4 years—came out of the service I was in New Mexico and they let me out to go to dental school. And I came back to the jumper project in '62, and jumped '62, '63...'60, no '63, '64, '65. Yeah, '62 through '66...'65. So I guess I jumped about 7 seasons, and in that time I was jumping I jumped Yellowstone in '56 and '57 and 1963 I jumped the Yellowstone crew. After that pretty much background I ended up going to—when I got out of the service I went to dental school and jumped in the summer times.

FC: What got you interested in?

CM: —at Oregon

FC: In smokejumpers?

CM: Well, I had Connie Orr as one of my good friends and he was jumping. And while I was up on lookout making \$800—\$850 in the summer, you know—and then got deducted every meal and he [laughs] made a lot more money and the jumpers I saw at the district were kind of—that was kind of impressive.

FC: You said that Seeley Lake district wasn't pro-jumper so much. What was the reason?

CM: I don't know.

FC: I don't know.

FC: Because of the—

CM: Maybe it might have been a little jealousy because jumpers had a hell of a reputation.

FC: A good reputation for hard workers.

CM: Yeah. But the odds got stuck on the woodpile, cutting and splitting wood and they just...they weren't...I know when I put in for references through the district, I used all my foremen; I didn't use the ranger or the dispatcher or the assistant ranger for recommends. I used all my foremen—the guys I'd cleared trails under or cleared brush or, you know, the guys that you'd worked in the woods with.

FC: Right.

CM: Yeah.

FC: Your first jump was—first season with the jumpers—was in '55.

CM: Uh huh.

FC: Can you expound on some of the experiences you had that year such as training and so on?

CM: Well, in '55, of course, we had the old canvas gear, we didn't have the nylon, light nylon stuff. And they had that old five-point release harness that was a banger and I was pretty skinny; I can remember that old buckle hitting me pretty hard in the brisket and the sternum. But I went through training. I went and met the people at the project with Connie earlier, put in

my recommends and application, and was fortunately accepted. And I think they took about 60, 65 jumpers. They had...I guess they were supposed to have over literally thousands of applications—a couple thousand applications. So I felt really fortunate to get the job and to be there. And training was really tough, you know, we had a hot, hot summer and out in those canvas suits I can remember a lot of 90, 95 degree—one week there it was 90, 95 degrees out in those units. And I wasn't particularly talented at it so it was pretty hard work. But I took the necessary training and I remember Fourth of July we hadn't made our jump, our practice jumps yet, and I can remember going down with Connie Orr and George Lambros; we went down to West Yellowstone and visited the jumper project down there at West amongst other [laughs] things, and had a hell of a good time. And I was thinking they didn't take new jumpers down in West Yellowstone, but I really wanted to, after I had put a season in here, be considered for the West Yellowstone project because Milligan was running it and I was very fond of Tom Milligan; he helped me a lot on the units, but...and with my rolls and stuff. So I went ahead and jumped here and they put us out on project if we wanted to get free board and room, you know, go out on project. So I went on. Brauer conned me into going to Kelly Creek—told me all the elk were there—and I was dumb enough not to know it wasn't in Montana, it was in Idaho. [laughs]

FC: You went to Kelly Creek in '55?

CM: Yeah, on project.

FC: I was ranger at Kelly Creek probably a year or two later. Skip Stratton must have been ranger then.

CM: Probably, I never...Actually we stayed at Cedars and hung that phone line from Cedars to Kelly, and then after that, I put in—cleared a campground and put in a campground with another guy down at, I think where Kelly Creek comes into the Clearwater below—below Kelly Creek Ranger Station. But then we...I was there with, I think, there was Brave Fogle and Behan—Dick Behan—and...

FC: Professor?

CM: Yeah, yeah. Dick and I were fraternity brothers and roommates back here, but...And I can't remember who that fourth guy was right now. Webster, guy by the name of Webster from Virginia, went to VMI [Virginia Military Institute]. But anyway—

[Interruption]

So we'd been out of training working down at Kelly Creek. We'd been out of training 5 weeks, so it had to be—I don't have my log with me—but it had to be about the second week in August—13th, 14th, or 15th of August we got a call that come in for fires. And we got in the jumper base, mind you we hadn't jumped since our last practice jump.

FC: This your first fire jump?

CM: Yeah, over a month before, so that was a little scary only to find out that 16 guys had jumped East Spread, most of them were—a good share of them were overhead and 4 of the 16 were hurt. [laughs]

FC: Where was this fire?

CM: East Spread up in the Lolo, up on the Seeley District.

FC: Okay.

CM: It was kind of interesting to be on the same district that I'd worked. [laughs] But...And Heinle was on that fire; he kept time—he was timekeeper on the fire. But...so they decided to drop 16 more of us, and they decided to pick a little different spot because of the fact they hurt four guys. The guys that were hurt—I remember Wolfram. He and I were in R.O.T.C. together out at the university. Oh, Fritz was hurt, and Jack Wall was hurt. He twisted a back, and I don't remember who the other two guys were. They choppered them out. So we jumped at night, and I remember Connie Orr was in the plane, and Paul Wilson was the foreman. And I remember Connie and Paul jumped first. I think we were jumping a Ford—might have been a Doug because there was 16 guys. You hardly ever jump that many out of a Ford as I recall. But I jumped and the guy by the name of Michaels, and...from Oklahoma. We were on the same stick together and we jumped for a little meadow, and Michaels got a little bit over on the side and straddled a log; he broke his back, and so he didn't...he didn't ever make the fire. They choppered him out of there. Then they choppered the rest of us from the jump spot to the fire because they had lost it because they had so many guys working with hurt jumpers. So we ended up on that fire—ended up 7 out of 32 guys were choppered out for injuries...black—

FC: Were any of them real serious?

CM: I suppose Michael's back injury was probably pretty serious. Wall jumped again, Wilson jumped...yeah, Fred Wolfram rather jumped again. Paul Wilson broke three toes—worked the fire for about a day or two until they bothered him too much. And of course, once you had declared injury then you got taken off the pay so [laughs] it was incredible. By the way we were jumping, I think, I was GS-5 for \$1.42 an hour; no time and a half for overtime and nobody ever seemed to worry about things. You started working the first of June and you didn't get your paycheck until damn near the Fourth of July—first paycheck then. Had to borrow money or Dragsteads extended credit, so we'd buy Whites to jump with or boots. But we fought that fire. It was a special fire to me; I'll always remember it. It was special meaning, partially because it was the first one, but a lot of funny things happened. And there, Snuffy Smith was on that fire and Bunk Tolman; they were two southern boys, and I can remember Tolman went out and...No, Smith went out and put Tolman's hardhat out on a...on a tree when we were getting ready to hike out, and they both had pistols, which I don't think you're supposed to have, but

they both had .22 pistols. And [laughs] Smith says to Tolman, "I'll bet you can't hit my hardhat with your pistol." So they both proceeded to pull out their pistols and fill the hardhat with [laughs] 22 holes and come to find out it was Tolman's hardhat. [laughs] Then we had some special stew that Mac made up when he couldn't...he got hurt working a chainsaw, got a strained back. Of course, those 22's, those chain saws, are pretty heavy, and he was...he was a football player. I think he played for Stanford—tough guy. And he just couldn't stay on the fire line, they brought him in to cook. So he was cooking, that was before he got his...he got some real spasms. Had to go out in the chopper the next day. But he was cook; he had cooked some stew, and we came in to eat. Orr and Behan and Tolman and I were sitting there and we felt something down in the stew with our forks and I can't remember who hooked it out, but it was a pair of shorts. [laughs] And then the next guy hooks something and it was a sock, and then, of course, the best part was last. Towards the end someone hooks something—I think it was mine—I hooked it and I said, 'What the hell is this?' and it was a damn rubber. [laughs] So it was...it was quite a fire. We probably worked it 3 and a half, 4 days, and it seemed to me Malone was on that fire and that's about all I really remember about—

FC: How big was it, Cole?

CM: Oh, gosh, you know, I guided hunters in there for smoke. In fact, that grizzly I've got out there in the office I didn't kill too far from East Spread—probably 3, 4 miles. But I've looked up there since. I suppose, you know, not being a...being a new jumper and not pacing it or worrying about fire size yet too much, I would say 30, 40 acres. I don't know. It could have been a lot bigger than that, but it was real steep and rocky and kind of a snotty place to fight fire.

FC: Did you have any other fire jumps that year?

CM: I don't know. It seems to me like I got about five more it seems to me is all. I think I had 12 or 13 jumps that first year, you know, with the practice jumps.

FC: None of them stuck out...stick out in your mind?

CM: Oh yeah, oh yeah sure!

FC: Tell me about those.

CM: Yeah, you bet, yeah. I jumped with a guy by the name of Rex Post; he was an Oklahoman. And I remember we were over in the Selway, and we were right behind a storm, and soon as we saw one, we'd drop a couple of jumpers. We had to kind of fly circles until the storm moved out, we'd get in there. We had 22 guys with Doug and were dropping two guys at a fire and came down the end we dropped 20 of them. There was Post and I left. And it was too dark to jump so we went back and we hit the next morning. And that was probably the first time I ever bugged up my left ankle; I cracked it pretty hard. I might even...I might even have cracked the bone on that, but I never went to a doc on it. We worked that fire, and we just weren't holding

it worth a damn. I really thought we should have been up at the head of it, but Post was afraid it would get too hot on us, but we lost it. We lost it about 2, 3 hours when the two Lehfeltdts came in—

FC: Who were they?

CM: Jim. Jim and Bruce.

FC: No, I mean they jumpers or—

CM: No, they were working dist. they happened to be working on the Indianola at the ranger station, and they both ended up being jumpers, you know, but...In fact, I'm not so sure Bruce hadn't jumped once and then decided to go into district. But they came and the four of us tried to hustle that thing and we couldn't get...we couldn't hold it. So the next morning they dropped ten more jumpers out of the old Ford Trimotor, and that was a real sight to behold the next morning about 10 o'clock we got ten new men to help us put that bugger out. Leave it to old sleepy George Ostrom, he didn't want to dump down on the hillside there where there wasn't much problems. It was a little steep, but it wasn't much junk there. So he thought he'd stay on top by the trail and he hooked a snag and damn snag came over on him. I never got to see him; I was down on the fire, but that was, I think, Ostrom's last jump, old sleepy George he's, you know, he's a radio announcer up there at Kalispell, and now he's...I guess, he's editor of the newspaper, I guess, at Columbia Falls.

FC: Did the snag injure him?

CM: Oh, yeah, yeah crushed—broke some ribs and, oh, yeah, he had some—

FC: Had to be hauled out then?

CM: Oh, yeah, we...oh hell, it took half that crew of ten guys to cut a chopper spot for him because a lot of big trees in there to get a chopper close to him because they couldn't carry him very far. Yeah, yeah, I think, yeah, I saw a lot of injuries unfortunately, sure so. My first jump Tommy White broke his back, you know, he just went toe, heels, ass and fell over backwards up on Sherman One, yeah.

FC: But he wasn't paralyzed for life?

CM: Oh no, no—

[interruption]

—just probably a broken coccyx or something.

FC: Any other fires that stick out that year?

CM: Yeah, there was another really good fire we jumped that was kind of a classic in a lot of ways. We jumped 72 guys out of Missoula, and then they jumped 30 guys out of McCall. And it was over on...It was called Lost Packer fire. It was over on the Salmon, and it was about a 30-mile walk-out. And we got to jump in reproduction in lodgepole. And we only had one guy get hurt; it was one of our Missoula buddies, McKinney, from Kentucky, I believe it was, and he broke an ankle. Connie, I remember he had a lodgepole...We all hung up pretty good which is...it was a nice jump spot if you went by quite a few trees. Connie caught a tree and he kind of snapped him so he didn't have real good body position, he hit on the...he hit the ground. Most of us didn't get to the ground we just hung in the trees 10, 20, 30 feet up. Old Conrad he came right down on his back and leave it to luck of Orr, he had a log behind both knees, a log behind his head, never hurt him at all, just laid there like a [laughs] fall in a feather bed. But that was...that was kind of a fun fire. It was so big they got a bunch of honchos on that. I can remember this safety lectures there, and this old timer was telling us all to be careful, watch out for the staubs. And we'd fight fire all day, then, of course when jumpers are most effective is at night, you know, holding that line. But he was safety officer, and he didn't believe in night firefighting so he'd bring us all in and we'd go out and the trees fell across the line, [laughs] lit the fire again—across the line—and you'd have to build the line over what you'd built the day before.

Then we got that bugger taken care of, we got some...I guess some district people came in and stayed with the cleanup and stuff. And we got to get ready to go out, 102 guys in shifts, you know, well. So we were coming out and I can remember Len Kraut was our fire boss...he was our foreman, he was going to bring out our bunch which was probably about 16 guys. And we didn't have to bring any gear out because the packer was going to come in and get everything, we didn't even bring our personal gear out. We just...I mean our jump gear—all we had to do was bring our own personal stuff. And on those big fires it was always kind of interesting because these guys were all college students and they'd hustle when food came in and they'd get all the damn ham, coffee, and butter off the packs so, heck, you were lucky to get coffee, ham or butter on your...on your chow. And Terrace, Dick Terrace, he was from California, had this pack he made up ready to walk out 30 miles out of the Salmon and I'm not exaggerating when I say it weighed 60 or more pounds, because I helped him put it on his back; it was over 60 pounds. And, oh, Len Kraut about died. He said, 'God, Terrace, you're not going out 30 miles on the Salmon with that pack. You're going to be slowing everybody down.'

Terrace said, 'No, I'll keep up. I'll keep up.' So Len let him...let him do it, and we walked out the 30 miles. God, you get down that Salmon River Canyon and it is hot, you know. It's not only the 100 degrees; it's the reflection off those rocks and that hillside. And I remember, we probably after we hit the river, I suppose we had another 8, 10 miles of walk, it was probably close to 20 mile walk to the river or maybe more. And I can remember getting down to the river and starting undoing your clothes before you got to the river and the foreman tried to control us, keep us all back, but man I'll tell you we had 30, 40 guys in that river pretty fast. Geez, it was

just—

FC: Cool off.

CM: Oh, boy! It was marvelous. We all took a dip.

FC: What was he packing out in his 60 pound?

CM: Oh, hams, coffee, and butter [laughs] yeah, yes! And the part that's kind of interesting about this, mind you this is 1955 Lost Packer fire. In 1976, 21 years later, bicentennial year, I'm in Chicago competing with the Elks in the Elks competition, ritualistic competition with our team, and we'd finished competing, had a good go, we were leading everybody that competed so far; we were number one. And, of course, you have a run-off at the end so I decided to jump a plane and go up to Green Bay, Wisconsin to see if I could find my old man who I hadn't seen for years and didn't know what had happened to him. So I was going to go up there and I was staying—I stayed apart from the rest of the guys. They stayed down in dark Chicago with...in the old Blackstone Hotel. I went out and I stayed in a Holiday Inn right on Lakeshore Boulevard about 2 or 3 blocks from the Playboy Club, of course. And got on this bus that go out to the O'Hare Airport and pulled in to the International Hotel right across from the Playboy Club which I frequented. And geez, I see this bunch of stewardesses come out of the International to get on the bus, about five of them—kind of checking them over. I was single then; this was about the first year I'd been single. I was checking those stews coming on the bus and I see this guy behind them, the pilot, and I knew that one guy. And by the time he got on the bus, I grabbed him by the wrist, and I said, "Dick Terrace, 1955 Lost Packer Fire." Twenty-one years later I met a guy that I hadn't seen for 21 years. He'd lost a lot of hair, he's flying I believe for United, lived in Polk, New York. Got...we exchanged phone numbers and addresses and I'm just hoping we see him at the reunion. But that was interesting; that was neat.

FC: It'd be great if he shows up again—

CM: Oh, I'll call him long distance just to...I'll do everything to urge him to come, yeah. But that was pretty much...I don't really remember too much else that first year, I guess, except a great crew. We ended up—55 of us made it through a seventh jump and we're all pretty close and pretty good friends. And there was always some shenanigans going on in the dormitory. I remember Scotty Corley and Bob Harold were both wrestlers, I think they were nationally ranked wrestlers, and Harold was for sure, Bob Harold was; he tried for the championship for his—national championship for his weight division. He's wrestling for Oklahoma. Corley and Harold would go at it fighting at night and they'd just about tear that dorm apart, geez, and it was always in fun—really great time. Then I yeah...I remember I killed a rattlesnake over, working fire line over there by the Beacon, up by Deep Creek, you know. And we were walking out and I was walking out with another guy by the name of Larry Gunn, and I think Larry might have been from Kentucky also. Anyway, he was familiar with rattlesnakes, and I hadn't seen that many rattlers and I really didn't...couldn't believe a rattlesnake would be there. We were

coming in for chow and was walking the old coal line, you know, and it was cold, the ground was cold. Rattlesnake was there. It was laying there, and I thought it was a bull snake—no rattles showing. And I was going to pick it up, and Larry said, 'Hey, hold it. Hold it, Cole, that's a rattler I just bet you.' And he reached around with his shovel and moved the snake's body off its tail, and sure as hell it had eight rattles. And so Larry cut its head off, which was too bad because taxonomically you couldn't classify him that way without the head—without that skull. But I brought it home, and I remember I was skinning it in the dorm in my room that night and I ended up...Behan really had a fit about that. He said, 'Get that damn snake out of here. You're not skinning it in our room.'

FC: Why didn't he like it?

CM: Oh, I don't know. [laughs] I guess he just lacked class. [laughs] Yeah.

FC: Well, you talked about shenanigans, what about those besides wrestling and boxing?

CM: Well, let's see. [pauses] I'm trying to remember that crazy bugger that—geez, it's an Italian name—he was an old jumper. Milligan knew him real well—he's a fireman down in California, and he's come back to jump since because I'd seen him afterwards but...Not Vaquero but something like that. Anyway, he'd take a watermelon and inject it every night with syringes full of vodka, you know, and...And of course Brauer used to give those big talks about no girls in the dormitory and no beer and he tried to run a clean show, but he had a bunch of jumpers out there that—

FC: It was pretty hopeless then?

CM: They're [laughs] going...It's kind of fun too. I...the year before at the Sigma Nu house where I was eating one, two meals a day. Couldn't afford to stay there but I did eat there, but Marion Cameron was our cook for the fraternity. So I go out to the jumper base and I walk in the dormitory the first day of training and whose one of our cooks but Marion Cameron.

FC: Well I'll be darned.

CM: So I got to eat Marion's cooking for 12 months a year. [laughs] Well, yeah, I don't...It was pretty serious down in units didn't have much dinking around, training was pretty serious there. We knew they were being trained to do a job. When it came to make that jump you just sure...you forgot everything especially with it being 5 weeks, but that trainings really instilled in you.

FC: What training do you think was the best—that helped you in future life?

CM: Oh boy, you know I—

FC: You're an outdoorsman anyway, so—

CM: Yeah, I was an outdoorsman long before that, but I think...Yeah, I don't think; I don't think it was that ever made me aware of physical fitness or push as hard as I do towards physical fitness. I always did work out, you know. But it's particularly, I think, the let-down training if you're hung up in a tree, learning to be fast to get out of that tree and careful was extremely important. One year they had a funny one—old Kibbee, Frank Kibbee, in fact they named it the Kibbee let-down after Frank did it, he hooked up. This is after I came back jumping, and they had capewell harnesses, yeah—and they had Capewell releases I mean—and they had done away with the old five-point. And Kibbee was hanging up there down in the units on refresher training and [laughs] he threaded up through his harness, tied in, tragically enough, he tied into his own harness not the chute—into the D rings of the chute. So [laughs] he hit his capewells he fell to the ground about 30 feet; thank god there was a sawdust pit. He didn't get hurt, but that was called the famous Kibbee letdown. [laughs]

FC: Straight down. How about the next year, in '56?

CM: Oh, that was memorable...That was a big year for me. I went down...I was a junior in college, and I didn't have a car I don't think that I wanted to take so Milligan ended up after training picking me up and taking me down there with him. We went early before the rest of the crew was there and we set up the whole outfit down there in West Yellowstone. So we were driving every day from Mammoth to West Yellowstone with equipment and getting set up. We only had four jumpers and one squad leader directly responsible—

FC: You were...you were assigned to West Yellowstone that year?

CM: Yeah, well Milligan picked the crew. He handpicked the crew, and it was...When I say handpicked they weren't...Number one, they were guys who liked the woods and liked jumping, and he tended to pick guys that would get along well with one another. And we did; we functioned as a crew. We were one another's' best friends. And he had Dan Daniels and Nine Mile, and then Spence, that was Jim Spence, we all called him Spence, and they were jump partners and then they jumped every fire together. And then, the fellow I jumped with was a guy by the name of Ed Henry, who I'm sure will be at our reunion; I'm really looking forward to seeing Ed. I've seen him a couple times when we were in the service together, we crossed paths. You run into these guys all over, you know, all over, geez it's incredible where you meet old jumper buddies. But Henry had been jumping—that was about his third year, that was my second year. And it was high country, you know, that West Yellowstone I think elevation is about 67, 70, so it's pretty thin air. But we had a little Travel Air at first is what we were flying, and you could only drop two jumpers out of that. Milligan was about the greatest boss, brother, friend [laughs] that you could have. He expected a lot out of you work-wise, and you...it was well organized. And we'd go to work early in the morning and usually we'd—by 3:30, 4:00 we'd have put in our shift and we'd go down the Madison River below the park. We'd hike off the road about a quarter, half mile in there and strip down to our suits and jump in the Madison,

which it was pretty cool down there it's quite a ways below the fire hole. So jump out of the water, soap up real good, jump in, that was our bath see; that way we didn't have to light a wood fire in the cabin to get hot water see. So we'd bath there. And then we'd swim about a quarter, half mile down to the old dock that stuck out in the river and there's a lot of our friends be down there, and we'd do that—we'd spend a half hour, hour a night swimming hard against the current. And Daniels and I both swam for Montana so we used to swim pretty hard. And then after that we'd go home, we'd get something to eat, and then usually we'd fly patrols if they had one going, and I always took—volunteered for every patrol because I liked to fly.

One thing that's kind of interesting, talking about background and stuff, the first nine times—I was in an airplane ten times before I ever landed in an airplane. I'd never been in an airplane until I jumped. So I jumped the first nine times, the tenth flight we made a dry run and couldn't jump the fire and we came home, and I remember I was more frightened when the plane touched down than [laughs] anything I'd done in jump. But I think what—your first year jumping—I don't know if the other guys will share this, but I think you're too damn ignorant, too dumb, you know, ignorance is bliss, you don't even think about getting hurt. And you get hyped up because it's new, and you're nervous and all that, but possibly, certainly, some fear and maybe you're a little scared sometimes more than others, but you don't have the same thing. The second year you come back then you kind of come to the realization what the hell you're doing, and the risk involved. And the second year I remember my first two training jumps were much more frightening to me than the 12, 13, 14 jumps I made the year before, they were real...they were frightening for me. I was pretty apprehensive about those. Then after that 2nd year you get on the 3rd year then you start getting to be a salt, you're paying attention all the time and you just kind of get wrapped up with it and I'd say you're pretty settled down.

FC: You mentioned Milligan. Where is he now, or what's he doing?

CM: Well, Tom and I are still good friends, and Tom and Char, they've got three kids. Tom and...Kelly and Tim and...but he retired from Park Service. He'd be a darn good guy to interview if he'd remember much of this stuff because he's a hell of a hand. But he retired Park Service down in Teton, passed up opportunities for promotions just to stay where he wanted to live. Had a little bout with cancer that he's apparently has whipped, and he's living down in Moose. Charlene, his wife, is working for either the...I think she's working for the Yellowstone Park Company, and I think she sells books for them and stuff. But I know—I'm sure—he's already made reservations to come. We'll see Tom; in fact, I'm going to ask him to stay with me.

FC: That will be a good reunion. What other fires in '56 do you recall?

CM: Well, '56 was a real special year for us because it was all new country. And we had a little trouble keeping good pilots, had some—sometimes we had a few things that were a little frightening. And this strip we landed, did you...were you ever flying down there—ever fly in on that old strip, you know, right by town?

FC: The old strip it was [inaudible].

CM: Oh, boy! That was something else! It was pretty short with lodgepoles at the end, and you had to pick that baby up before the end. [I] believe it was Abe Bowler had the contract for Yellowstone, contracted directly with the Park Service. And to go to Park Service as a jumper you gave up your Department of Agriculture Forest Service contract and assumed the Department of Interior Park Service contract, okay. So you're re-contracted and you're working for a whole different outfit that fought fire a lot differently and had a lot different concepts. Not near as...I'm sure they have some real pros now, but they weren't near as aggressive and understood firefighting like the Forest Service did. The Forest Service is more into the game, whereas the National Park people very...Once in a while you ran into some good people at new fire, you know, like Scotty Chapman was our fire dispatcher and guys like him who've been around a long time.

FC: Bob Sellers down there?

CM: Don't remember him. But Lyle, DeLyle Stevens, and...But anyway, Abe Bowler contracted with the Park Service with a plane down there, and his first pilot was Jerry Wilson, hot pilot, hot pilot, fun to fly with. I'm sure he was kind of a fighter pilot type.

FC: He kind of heavy-set blond?

CM: At the time he wasn't all that heavy set; he was...you know he wasn't real heavy, but—

FC: He flew TBM's later on didn't he?

CM: Yeah, right that's Jerry, Jerry Wilson. In fact he opened his own business. But flying with him was great, but then Jerry went off on another project and they sent another pilot down, and this pilot was a guy by the name of Joe Monahan, and, oh, I liked Joe; he was...He just come out of recuperation from an aircraft crash up in the Salmon where a guy had contracted him to ferry a plane for him because the guy didn't know how to fly—ferry this plane for him which he was buying somewhere else. So Joe Monahan was the pilot goes with the guy that flying a plane and they have to go across the Salmon. And I don't know where their taking the dang thing to, but anyway, I guess they lost engine and he had to ditch it. Of course, Salmon isn't the...He picked the flattest, smoothest ridge he could see and he laid it down and tragically the fellow who had bought the plane, the passenger, was killed.

FC: What kind of ship?

CM: Broken neck. Can't remember. [interruption] I doubt it was a Travel Air, the plane.

FC: But the owner was killed?

CM: Yeah, the owner was killed. I can't remember. Joe's told me what that...it could have been a Cessna, little Cessna, it was a single engine plane.

FC: Single engine.

CM: Uh huh. And he was...it happened...I thought it happened the same summer '55. Let's see, that's not '55 that was '56. I thought it happened that same summer. But Joe had a little bit of disfigurement to his face from hitting the controls when he...when they crashed. And he limped off of one leg, and he was a scared pilot. We had a hell of a time getting him down low to the ground, getting him down to drop cargo.

FC: After that?

CM: Yeah, or go down to look at something. Yeah, as good as the plane we were flying, that Travel Air we were flying had great performance, but getting someone down. I don't know. We might have had...you know, I'm wrong. We ended up having a German Fokker with that F-O-K-K-E-R, Fokker, and I think that thing was like a like a 1927 airplane or something. I've got pictures of that damn thing. That's what we had that first year I jumped there was a...the old Fokker, and that was like the old Ford Trimotor but a single engine, you know. And you could coast it anywhere with that thing, you could take it right down, but Joe was a little frightened. So anyway, I've got watched Joe all summer. He didn't have any money, Boy, if he hadn't had four jumpers and a squad leader to have...that always had groceries and bringing some fish in and stuff I think he'd have starved to death. But he was really hurting for bucks. We fed him all summer. [laughs]

And one night we got to drinking a little bit...there's this...You do a little bit of that down in Yellowstone duty because it's really high hazard duty, you know. [laughs] So we were having a party and [laughs] that damn Dan Daniels decides he's going to try to find out what the hel'ls wrong with Joe's face, it looks like something in there, he's just sure there's something in there. So we headed up, heating up this quart bottle, milk bottle, got that bugger just boiling hot and cooled the neck down just a little bit so you could lay the lips of that bottle against Joe's face. It was on his cheek, I can't remember if it was his right or left cheek on his face, just about the height of the cheek bone, and we stuck that thing on there and then we started putting ice around it and iced towels and so it'd form a big suction. And I'll be damned something—it just popped—and a bone, I mean, a wood sliver came out of his face. And as I recall—recollection what is that; that's over 20 years ago I guess isn't it—the damn thing was over an inch long, came out of his face, puss drained out of there and that partially closed. I got pictures of him somewhere but that partially closed eye and that puffed look like you get when you have a dental abscess or something, that all went away. That all healed up, and he looked like a new man. God, his face looked so much better. But we had to be with him over a month before we did that to him, and then we bought him... [laughs] We poured him...poured a few drinks down him to get it. [laughs]

FC: Have to be somewhat drunk to do that unprofessional doctor's work.

CM: Yeah, oh, yeah, I cut the crews, yeah, this probably was...probably one of my more memorable years because I guess the crew was—you got so close, and we did so many fun things together, worked well together, played well together, and drank well together. But we used to go out and cut lodgepole to build a perimeter fence around Yellowstone Park, at that end we had a lot of lodgepole. And I can remember we would drive a stake before we dropped a tree and see who could hit that stake. And Daniels was tough to beat, Dan was a real, real cat in the woods. And we ended up working as bouncers in local bars. Can you imagine me?

FC: After work?

CM: Yeah, I worked at...Yeah, on holidays, yeah.

FC: Yeah, you didn't weigh enough to be a bouncer.

CM: No, I was about 160, 6 foot 2, 160 pounds. I never could hold much weight then, we worked pretty hard. But had some real neat, romantic deals, you know. I got Milligan back together with his old girlfriend, Charlene, who he ended up marrying. And, of course, the whole crew was in the wedding. And by the way, Milligan wouldn't let me cut his—I cut everybody's hair all summer, and Daniels cut my hair, but we all wore crew-cuts. But Milligan wouldn't let me cut his hair for the wedding.

FC: Can you blame him? [laughs]

CM: [laughs] No, Charlene from drinking out of—beer out of beer cans got cold sores all across her lips the week before the wedding—god, that's been. We went down to Sugar City to get him married off. Milligan was all fighter and he—I remember he took me aside one night, he said, 'Now, you can well plan on Charlene's brothers trying to kidnap me because they think that's going to be funnier than hell.' And he says, 'You're going to make sure that I don't get kidnapped on this deal.' So we promised that we'd back him; he knew that he could trust us. So we stashed—we hid the car for him so he could get out of town. I was going with one of Charlene's roommates that was runner-up Miss Utah, Frances "Legs" Hill, oh, incredible lady. Oh, and she was from Sugar City too, and she was in the wedding party, of course. And I can't remember Susan's last name, but there was a bunch of the gals stayed together down there and they were all in the wedding party. We were all in the wedding party. So it was just a great time. We had this marvelous wedding in a Mormon church.

And Henry and I went out and bought quarts of vodka, and I slipped in the kitchen while these little Mormon girls are fixing up punch. Needless to say, no booze in their punch. And [laughs] I took...Ed...I got Ed kind of...get him a little bit busied up. And I ended up take...smuggling some Seven-up bottles out that they were putting in the punch, empty, and I poured them full of vodka and put them back into the Seven-up rack and they'd pour them in the punch. So I wasn't

guilty of spiking the punch I just filled the bottles and let the girls pour it in. So we got that Mormon punch well spiked and I had to wait until the right bowl came out, and I can remember Milligan was in the reception line and he hated that; he was standing there in that suit, you know. I went up and took him a drink and he tasted that, and he smiled. [laughs] And we made the fatal mistake of getting too much to Charlene's dad. [laughs] But, but that was quite...that was one hell of a Mormon wedding I'll tell you. And then afterwards I think each one of us took a member of the wedding party and kidnapped her. [laughs] And probably didn't go back to West Yellowstone for a couple days as I recall.

FC: The fire—hit fires were burning all—

CM: Oh no, no, that was the asbestos forest. We didn't get many jumps down there, you know. We didn't have near the fires, you know. I probably only got five fire jumps there all summer, I think.

FC: Have you been down to the present base?

CM: No, I never have seen...never really was interested.

FC: I've been down there. Maybe you can describe what the old base was—what it was like.

CM: Oh, man, you bet.

FC: Your facilities.

CM: No, incredible facilities, open hanger, like an open barn with one wall out. And an asphalt runway that was just—if you didn't take off of there in the cool of the morning you wouldn't get out of there. And they killed somebody every year on that strip. Guys would come in at night with their girlfriends and party all night and get up and have breakfast and try to fly out of there at noon and the density altitude was too high there, even though it was only 6,770, it was such thin air.

[Break in audio]

And so the asphalt was all peeling off the runway and when...After we jumped at night whoever was left at the base would radio in and we'd have to park cars. There's no lights out there. It's just an old...it's just like a farmer's field in the middle of lodgepole pine. The only thing is you had to touch down right over town and your wheels had to almost be touching treetops, set down and get in there. And we [inaudible]

FC: [inaudible] the loft facilities then?

CM: When you talk about loft you mean for hanging chutes?

FC: Hanging chutes probably you didn't have one.

CM: [laughs] We hung them in trees. We'd hang a pole across trees. We had a pole strung across two trees outside and the only time you could hang them and inspect them. We ran a good tight ship. I wasn't a rigger yet, so I didn't do any rigging, but I used to inspect chutes and clean them for them. And we probably only had eight jumpers, we had backpacks...Four jumpers, eight backpacks—two backpacks a jumper—and we each had our emergency packs plus one extra at the base. That's about all we had [inaudible]. I'm sure the other guys talked about, we jump in all C-ration...Wait a minute now. I was getting C and K...which is the latest one.? K, isn't it?

FC: C, I think.

CM: C was...yeah, C was the better, wasn't it? That's what we jumped.

FC: It was better than the K.

CM: Yeah, okay. We jumped C-ration and paper sleeping bags, but that was a luxury in Yellowstone. It was so cold in there and your jumps were so high that we got to take those old Air Force...Army bags, those mummy bags, downs, feather downs.

FC: Yeah, the paper sleeping bags wouldn't be much in that cold elevation.

CM: No, you know, Behan bet somebody on that first fire, you know back in Spread, he bet somebody he could stay in his skivvies in a paper sleeping bag all night, he said it just isn't that cold in August. Well Dick was from—oh heck, I think Dick's from Indiana. Yeah, he was a writer, you know a real...He was a forestry student, but he was a writer. He was a hell of a good writer. And Dick was just sure that he could do that so he bet somebody...I can't remember. I wish, maybe at the reunion someone will remember who that was. But they bet to Behan, he was tireder than hell, you know, six-pack of beer and a bottle of whiskey, that was a big bet—big bet. He bet he'd do that and I tell you that poor bugger. Connie ought to—should remember who it was, who he bet with. But he stayed out and you could hear him up all night long He'd get up with that sleeping bag, that paper bag around him, you know. He'd get over against the fire, oh, he was just miserable. I suppose that Spread area—east Spread. That was probably...I bet that's 7,000 feet—over 6 certainly. But yeah, that was...So those paper sleeping bags weren't...I didn't mind going to Yellowstone and having cloth. And even then we jumped some paper, but we always bring...we'd haul our chute inside and roll it in our chute in that nylon. We'd hang those chutes out there and inspect them and—I can't remember. Seemed that Milligan rigged. I don't know with a crew of four...Henry wasn't a rigger. He learned to do some of it; he wasn't really a rigger. I don't think we had but one rigger and that was our squad leader, so we tried to do everything we could for him, you know. We didn't do any repairs there [inaudible].

FC: No, you had to ship them back to Missoula.

CM: Yeah, and see the whole front end of this huge barn; it was just a big open barn that we pulled the plane in and had a table down the side. And we'd go...we'd hear a plane come in to land and we'd run out and try to get them to...when they were coming in on taxi to cut their engines down or face another way because that wind would hit that apron area out there and blow all that dirt in there and blow your chute off the table and you'd have to start again. You know these weights you use for holding down your panels and stuff they wouldn't hold when that prop blast. But yeah, it was quite a thing; you'd start a chute and just about get the baby ready to start tucking it, you know, and you'd have problems and then you'd have to stop and wipe the tables. [laughs] You had four segmented tables that went together to rig on. But it was a...it was just a...we had marvelous fishing, great company, good people. It was just an...and in West Yellowstone wasn't all that big then. And we were not a wild bunch of guys. We got along good in the community, had a lot of friends in the community, and it was just a real...When it's something small like that we'd even make—we made some tourist jumps, you know. Actually, they were practice jumps...that we hadn't jumped. We didn't get a lot of fires see, and it was just kill you to listen to the radio because Missoula would be going ape, see. McCall—everyone was jumping all over the country, and here we're sitting in the asbestos forest. And a lot of times, you know, they'd get fires, and they wouldn't let us go on them. They'd put ground pounders on, and they'd dink around.

One of the fires we went on was...it was a real dandy. It was at...on the edge of Yellowstone Lake and by boat you had to go at least 20 miles across Yellowstone I believe—certainly 15 miles—and you went way up Finger it's over behind Chicken Ridge. Got to know that park area pretty well when you flew that every night, you know. And they found that fire and they wouldn't send us on it, in fact I'm not so sure we didn't fly patrol and see it and report it. And they wouldn't let us jump it and they let that sucker go with a ground party going in to get it by boat. And the ranger was Bob Sharp, and he was...That's the third guy we've mentioned from Kentucky. But he'd just come from a forest in Kentucky with the Park Service, hadn't fought much fire, and he got an immense earache I guess—or some damn thing. Anyway, he ended up staying at the shores of beautiful Lake Minnetonka right down on old Yellowstone Lake, and that's where most of the crews stayed. And they sent guys, smoke chasers, off to look for that fire and it was about 3, 4 miles from the lake. And if a guy knew how to run an azimuth, you know, one of the old smoke chasers in the old day or a Forest Service type would've walked right into that thing. But they didn't find it so finally they saw a little smoke the next day. Geez, the fire's now over a day old, you know, and they finally decided, yeah go ahead and take your jumper gear with you. Gunsell I think was dispatching that, and Gunsell wasn't very pro-jumper. He did about everything he could to get somebody else on a fire.

FC: That's Les Gunsell?

CM: Yes. Did you know famous Les?

FC: Yeah.

CM: Oh, boy.

FC: He had Saguaro National Monument, I think, down in New Mexico.

CM: Oh, nice place.

FC: Er, Arizona rather.

CM: Nice place for him. [laughs] But anyway Les was not big about using us, so Milligan talked him into taking a...taking our jump suits with us and parachutes. And sure as hell when we flew over that about 10:30, 11:00 she's starting to smoke up a little bit and nobodies on it. We're talking about a fire that's lit a day-and a-half earlier by lightning and heavy, heavy fuel—beautiful meadow right next to the fire to jump into just gorgeous meadow.

FC: Did you like to pull pine type?

CM: Yeah, mostly, yeah. And there was...there was some...there was some big stuff in there. No, well, I'm not sure that might have been heavier than...There was lodgepole in there, but we had some real heavy timber in there. These loggers would've loved to get in there and ripped that out, I'll tell you. But anyway we got suited up; Henry and I got suited up and oh Ed always jumped first because he was the old jumper. And he was on the ground, I was coming in. And I jumped 28's, we had the 32's and the 28's; I always jumped a 28, which was a little...We came down pretty hard sometimes in that high elevation. And I'll be damned I couldn't get my chute collapsed and that was my first smokejumper injury, I broke that little finger, that knuckle [laughs] on my right hand.

FC: Because it was too windy?

CM: Oh, I was...I was getting drug, the wind got—

FC: Because of the wind.

CM: Yeah, yeah, but we had such a good spot. So Milligan decided to drop our fire packs over by the fire so we wouldn't have to haul them, and that might a...that didn't work out so good because they hung it up in about 50-, 55-foot trees. So they dropped a saw at the meadow and we had to cut these trees down. We were starting to cut those trees down, and one tree starts to fall on the shroud line of 550-pound cass loops over another tree. We had a hell of a time. And meanwhile the fire is going, she is raging. By the time we got our gear and got on that thing...I mean we were just soaking wet. We drank probably a quart of water an hour, a piece. I mean we were really going through the water. And that baby was crowning, she was really...It

was old see, it'd been laying there dried out and boy when she took off she roared.

FC: How many were on the fire line?

CM: Oh, just Ed and I—were the only two who jumped it—

FC: Just the two of you?

CM: Yeah, the other guys were still back at the lake. Well when that baby torched off they could see that smoke from the lake apparently. And about 3:00 in the afternoon boy old Henry and I hadn't quit working, you know, we'd been on the fire line 4 or 5 hours trying to hold that puppy, and we weren't holding it obviously, it was going a lot faster than we could hold it. It was...I'm sure it was ahead of us a quarter mile at least all the time, you know, once it ran with that heavy wind. Geez, around the head of the fire and through the smoke comes this 18-year-old or 19-year-old kid working for the Park Service with that crew. Man, I'll tell you when he walked through the smoke and we saw him, we about flipped. He came around the head end; he could have walked up into a peninsula of no fire and been surrounded like that [snaps his fingers].

FC: Right.

CM: Oh! So we told that kid, 'Now, son, you go back out this way and go around the head of your fire so the smoke is blowing away from you and you can keep track of it.' And—

FC: Was he by himself or was he—

CM: Yeah, by himself.

FC: And he was supposed to be a smoke chaser?

CM: Yeah, he was looking for the fire, yeah. Well, he was with the crew, you know; they had four or five.

FC: Yeah.

CM: Then it ended up...that fire cost them over a quarter million—Park Service—by their screwing around and not getting on it. That was one thing that always upset me. The whole jumper concept is get on it, you know. I always thought even...I personally felt you should've known in the morning who was set for a jump, up to 2 to 16 guys, and they ought to have their gear in the airplane and they ought to be white-washing buildings or cleaning aprons or, hell, there'd be nothing wrong with sitting in a damn ready room playing cards. This thing that you always had to be on a work detail—that isn't the way you're ready for fire.

FC: Yeah, the firemen downtown aren't that way.

CM: Hell no! They should have been right there and our getaway time should have been incredibly fast we should have broke...Fast, we should have broke...Our defense command take offs when we hustle on a...on a unidentified aircraft alert situation. We should have been really quick on those getaways but that wasn't always the case and it...And the other thing was that these guys would dink with fires so long instead of letting us get on them. And remember I was on the other end; I'd been a lookout, and I'd reported fires. And I knew when I reported fires, and I knew when they finally got fire fighters to them. And that lag time was too much. Granted nine out of ten aren't going anywhere, but in some of those good years they went—they would really go. '55 was one of those years. I never was on two-man fire. They were always big fires when they went; they were big and such. So I really resented the fact they screwed around so long getting crews on especially when you're paying stand-by an aircraft already, and the price of two jumpers by then we had jumped up 12 cents a pound...12 cents a pound, 12 cents a buck—on an hour work. So we were clear up from \$1.42 up to a buck 54 so we were really highly paid, highly trained, and we were...Let's see then we were GS-5 still, yeah. But it wouldn't have cost them...When you consider that...what...by the way they ended up losing a man on that-guy dropped die...guy died of a heart attack on that Surprise Creek fire. But that was...that was quite an experience.

FC: Park Service employee?

CM: Mm hmm, or someone they picked up to fight fire.

FC: Well, I'm sure they jump on them a lot.

CM: They had over 100 guys on the fire, that they hiked in there. And hell, I don't know if the guy died on the fire line or if he died hiking in, you know, it's hard...But, geez, you know, when you got jumpers in there in shape and worked, ready to go, god, nah, it's too much nonsense, too much trying to make a glory thing. That isn't the way it ought to be. Yeah, they're just...all they are is fire fighters just like—most of them are ground pounders before. And all we did we learned a new way to get to a fire and that was jump out of an airplane. By the way, I...we tried the helicopter thing. That was frightening. I got a series of pictures on that—that was frightening. You'd just about put your knees through your ears because you'd jump when the pilot told you to jump, when he thought he was over the lowest piece...the highest piece of ground. And, boy, if that chopper moved a little bit, you might be 12, 14 feet from the ground.

FC: What year was that?

CM: I think that was '55 that we played with choppers. I don't know. I had a series of pictures of it. I'm not sure, but we played with jumping—standing on the runner and jumping, free-falling, just jump with no chute.

FC: Forest Service has helitack crews but they don't jump out they land and then—

CM: No, they land, they land. But remember we didn't have the real fine, super-charged, high performance chopper then.

FC: Had the G-33.

CM: Yeah, so you had to try to avoid landing with the damn things in that high country, you know. So they were going to jump the guys and that was no good. And just too much. But jumping, you know, for the number of guys that jump not many guys really got hurt, you know. And we...you learn sometimes. You jump some stuff that's risk, but, you know, you always had...you had the choice most of the time whether you wanted to jump or not, unless it was a big crew fire in a big spot. But on a two-manner the squad leader always asked you if you liked it.

FC: What's your most memorial—that isn't the word—most memorable jump fire and then project fire?

CM: [laughs] I'll answer it backwards, I'll take the project first. I think the best...the best project fire was when Len Kraut and another guy were up on training, up by Deep Creek again and they lit a bunch of piles of slash—log slash for jumper training. [laughs] And [pauses] they lit a little bit more than they had guys to fight it and we had wind and, mind you these are the best fire fighters around, I mean Leonard Kraut's just one hell of a good fire fighter, you know, he's just...he's done a lot of it. But two of those piles burning together—I think Cooley was there too and I think Earl might have been torching a few, and they just torched a little more fire than they had men to handle. And we ended up clearing the base out on that one.

FC: But this was for a practice fire.

CM: Practice, oh yeah. It didn't end up practice. It's like your burns—controlled burns. I think the jumpers made more money on controlled burns than they did on jump fires.

FC: That's one of the reasons they had to change it to prescribed fires.

CM: [laughs] Yeah, yeah, yeah. Yeah, I don't know, that was probably the best one there, and I guess—it's really hard to say. I remember jumping a two-manner. Certainly, it'd have to be a two-manner because they were the most memorable ones. I guess probably one of the nicest ones in '50, no, '63, I decided that I was going to go jump Yellowstone. It was my 2nd year back—that would have been about my 5th year jumping I guess, 2nd year back from the service. And Earl Cooley had a big meeting, and everyone was in there, and he introduced his overhead, and then he named off his new squad leader, and asked me to come forward. And introduced me to everybody as the new squad leader. [laughs] And he didn't know that I had it all hooked up to go to Yellowstone—get on the Yellowstone crew. By now it was an eight-man

crew down at the Yellowstone. And so I wasn't all that grateful being a squad leader. I was...I felt bad about telling Earl I wasn't going to be able to take it, but I went down to Yellowstone. And my partner that year was Ed Courtney, and our squad...Yeah, our squad leader was [pauses] Hans Trankle—was our squad leader that year. No, I'm wrong...Might...it might have been Jim Manion. Let's see. Manion. No, Manion was squad leader there in '57. All right it was Hans Trankle was our squad leader. And Courtney and I were jump partners, and then there was...I can't remember. Oh yeah, Larry Nelson was jumping with a kid from Oregon. Bob Oswald, I believe it was Bob Oswald, or Good...maybe it was Goodman. I can't remember Bob's ...no, Oswald's right—Bob Oswald. He was a schoolteacher from Oregon. And then there was Ingram and Bell and Ed Knoll and geez I'm forgetting somebody. I can't think who that eighth man was. Ingram, Bell, Knoll, Courtney, Nelson, MacPherson. I can't remember who that other guy was. But anyway, Courtney and I jumped a fire up in the park. Boy, we made a lot of nice jumps that year—beautiful country.

FC: You're talking about '63 now?

CM: Yeah.

FC: Yeah.

CM: Oh, we jumped up the head of Slew Creek on a place called—it was over from Slough Creek. We walked out to Slough Creek I believe. No, we didn't either. It was called Maple Creek. And we had just dropped Knoll and Ingram...Knoll and Bell we'd not...Dropped them on Pelican Creek, clear across the park. We had to zip across the park and get over to where we were going to jump our fire and it was dark. We got out of the plane not much more before dark; probably the latest I ever jumped in the evening. And the decision—we couldn't find a jump spot, and we ended up jumping about a mile and a half, 2 miles below our fire because it was all just crud up in there, downfall and junk, and we thought it would be better to walk a little more distance and not take a chance getting dinked that way when you couldn't get anyone to help you. And the thought was we were going to keep our...Well we didn't have flashlights; they were in our packs. Trankle dropped the packs at the fire, and we drop a mile and a half, 2 miles below—we got nothing. And the best grizzly country in the United States next to Alaska, and you weren't allowed any firearms of course. We didn't have a pulaski, a shovel, a sleeping bag, nothing. So Courtney and I—I was the rigger that year. I rigged for everybody. So I told them, I says, 'I don't mind rigging our emergencies. Let's pop, and we'll sleep in two parachutes a piece.' It was a pretty short night; we didn't sleep real good, you know, as soon as it was a twinkle of daylight we started moving. And we were walking to our fire next morning, and I smelled smoke. And we knew we had to cross at least one major creek and it would be on the opposite side the fire'd be. We hadn't even come to the creek yet, we were just going by compass, you know—well, and reading terrain. We had it pretty well memorized where to go. I smelled that smoke, and I went through the lodgepole—kind of scrubby at that high elevation. And, hell, here's a fire we hadn't even seen, and, we didn't have any way of fighting fire, no tools. So we had our whites, our logger boots on, our jump boots, and we kicked in the edge of

fire, all the pine needles into the fire, and we moved all the trees so that it couldn't cross out of there. It blazed up a little bit. And we must have done a hell of a good job because it never went beyond what we did. Then we went into the main fire, and—

FC: Half a mile away or so?

CM: Oh, yeah, yeah, probably a little over half a mile. And we found our fire, and it was in the rocks. It was a hard bugger to put out; it was on a...just above a creek on a hillside in kind of like a slide with trees in it. And I can remember I'd just made up a pack rod and I...It was four sections of rods about a foot and a half length, and we had a little creek right there. And I'll be damned, one evening Courtney went and caught five little cutthroats, and...for dinner. Geez, that went good with the chow. And we stayed on our fire until we thought we had it as good out—when you got fire in rocks you're never sure, you know.

FC: Right.

CM: We thought we had her. Cold nights, you know. And we waited until—close to the end—through the burning period. It was 3:00, 4:00 in the afternoon before we left it, and then we hiked down to the next fire and—with our equipment—and cleaned that up. And it hadn't spread at all. So we essentially fought two fires; spent close to a day on one and 2 days on the other one. Logged quite a bit of time; logged probably 40 maybe, no, we probably logged close to 60 hours of overtime on the two fires.

FC: The one that wasn't detected; looked like it had more of a potential than the one in the rocks?

CM: Well pro...It could have. We had things going our way. It just didn't go...I don't know why nothing ran on us. We just...we were on them pretty early, you know, they were just new fires and they were small when we got them. But then we hiked down to where we had slept that first night when we jumped, and we slept there and waited for a chopper to come, and we took off. And we might of...off the book. We left plenty early in the morning we...because we didn't want to go out in a helicopter. We wanted to hike out of that country. And we had that old fishing pole and as we hiked out, we fished out of that creek, and we hiked out I suppose—I don't know—15, 20 miles—no trail, all game trails. Had to be a lot of game in there because geez the trails were like cow paths. And we hiked out all the way out to the highway and then, you know, hitch-hiked back into the base. That was...that was an awfully nice fire for me. And then we jumped up on head of Slough Creek on another fire. I think my jumps that year averaged close to 8,500 feet.

FC: That's pretty high average.

CM: Real high country, yeah.

FC: Did you run into any grizzly at all on fires?

CM: Not, what I did—

FC: Or going to fires?

CM: No, I'll tell you I never...you know we had them...Every night we came in patrol with the plane we'd see them coming into that dump out of west. We'd see one big old boar, hell he must have come in 10, 15, 20 miles a night. He always came from the same direction, and he'd be headed for the dump and then he'd go back to where he'd like to lay, I suppose, all day. And we'd see him coming in, and we'd see them at the dump and stuff, but on the fire, no. But probably because of the smoke and the clanging and the working and stuff. But at the...we'd lose our plane; they were only contracted up to Mem...What is Labor Day? September 1?

FC: Normally, yeah.

CM: Yeah, I always get Memorial and Labor Day mixed up. Labor Day would come, and that's about when the plane would go back. And when the plane went back that meant you had to hustle jobs on...somewhere in the park and hope someone could use you. Well, we had a pretty damn good reputation, you know, as a bunch of workers. This crew—we had some guys that were laggards, we had some things happen that I prefer not to even talk about or think about, but there were some things that weren't really very pleasing to those of us that were proud of being jumpers and wanted to maintain a good rapport with everybody and have...We wanted to go everywhere and have people proud of the work we were doing and...but anyway we didn't have all great workers, but we usually didn't have any...When we had a crew of four, we could get jobs anywhere, you know. And I didn't have much problems getting a job that some of the other guys did.

FC: You couldn't get the job back with the Forest Service the rest of the year?

CM: Well, I did that too. They didn't like to shift contracts, but I came back one year and jumped 100 fires after I jumped Yellowstone. But I, the first year, told them...Let's see, what the hell year '56 what did I do? I went on lookout for them up to...We hiked...we packed into Heart Lake and I went on Sheridan Mountain lookout, which is, oh, quite a bit over 10,000-foot elevation.

FC: What forest?

CM: Oh, this is in Yellowstone.

FC: Oh, you're still talking about Yellowstone, okay.

CM: Yeah, yeah, all at Yellowstone, yeah. Oh, my most memorable times were Yellowstone—

FC: Right.

CM: —by far because of the beauty of the country and the game. But we...I went into Sheridan and stayed up there for—I can't remember—a couple, 3 weeks for them until they didn't need me there, and then I had to go back to dental school. I damn near couldn't get a physical; I couldn't get a physical through dental school to jump because they thought it was so dumb for a guy putting that much money into an education to go back and do something so dumb, and Dr. Woodward wasn't going to let me...See, I was kicking albumin in my urine, so he was saying I kidney disfunction or didn't have good working kidneys. And he wasn't going to let me jump, and I finally told him, I says 'Hey, I don't really care what...how you feel about my jumping, but I'll go to somebody and get a physical that will show that I'm okay for jumping,' which I knew I was. And [laughs]...but I jumped every summer in dental school through. I mean it was just like heaven to get back in the woods after grinding it out like that. Jumping was always fun for me, seeing the guys and being back. But getting back to this fire up on Slough Creek, we jumped up in that high country and never saw a bear but we saw tracks. And it was only when I went on project I told them I was a packer and so Jim Spence took me out and showed me how to put a pack saddle on an animal [laughs] on a napkin in a cafe. And so I became a packer.

FC: With all that expensive training.

CM: And, and that was in '57, and I had a...All I had was one horse, a riding horse, and a mule. And you just had the one mule, and I was supposed to get everything out of the Pelican Creek cabin, and then go up to lookout and get everything out of...out of the lookout down to the cabin and bring the things out that should come out. And Nelson—I can remember when...I took him up first. We had one horse and one mule. We'd packed the mule. Took my girlfriend, who I married, Thea, took her up there and left her at the cabin, and I took Nelson up to the lookout. She might have gone with me—took a load up there. Gorgeous country! Have you ever been up Pelican Creek?

FC: No.

CM: Oh, great big meadow with elk everywhere, and hell I've seen seven coyotes in a day out there...been up. And this is all in September, see. This is after the plane went back. And buffalo in the lodgepole just like elk, just...and just as frightened as an elk when we jump. And oh, it was just gorgeous country and beautiful grizzly country. The head end would be up towards the Mirror Plateau, which was super griz habitat. And I put Nelson up there and then Nels—

FC: That's Larry Nelson?

CM: Larry, yeah, Larry had...Larry and I swam against each other. He swam for the University of Idaho, I swam for Montana, so we met that way first, and then he worked in the park when I was jumping the first year, and then he became a jumper. And so that's...Larry and I knew each

other well, we were good friends, I buy all my posts—poles—from him. Posts from him now. But...and we both are trappers, so we have a lot in common. But Nelson went up on lookout and decided after a week or so that he had to come out and go to school, so I packed him off and I...Someone came in and got the stock, and I went up and stayed on lookout. And I went up there with whatever gear I had, which is two pair of pants with holes in both of them, and about three shirts, and one jacket, and a pair of boots, and about four or five pairs of socks, and not many groceries. And they called me one night and they said—I'd reported a fire behind the lookout about 3, 4 miles—and they waited kind of late in the day to tell me to go for it. And it was so cold at night in September that the geysers and all that hot water start steaming and you couldn't kind...You couldn't tell smoke from steam; it was really tough. And I got back in there about 3 miles, and I have a lot of good pictures of bulls charging at me. It was probably about the 20th of September, bulls were bugling, it was colder than hell. And I was coming back. I decided—it was about 10:30, 11:00 at night I thought. I didn't have a sleeping bag, and I thought I'd better get back up the lookout. They just wanted me to check it out and see if it was going anywhere, and just kind of knock it down a little bit and go back to the lookout. So I didn't find it, but I got some great buffalo pictures and elk pictures wandering around looking for that thing. Had bulls charge right up at me, 15 feet away—

FC: And then they'd stop, huh?

CM: —big, six-, seven-point bulls. Yeah, snort, yeah, thank god they always stopped. I never figured anything else would happen, but I don't know what I'd have done if they have charged me. Hit them with a shovel—pulaski. But I was coming back on the main ridge that went back up the lookout. I thought it was—I sure as hell hoped it was 11:00 at night, by now the moon was out, could see pretty good. And something came up—lot of noise, lot of animals moving—and something came out the bottom of this hillside meadow, so I stopped and waited until it walked out of the shadows of the trees, until the moon-lighted area—moon-lighted area—and it was a bear. And I watched the bear. It was a pretty good-sized bear I thought, and then I realized it was a damned big bear, and even with moonlight I could tell it was a grizzly. And I'll tell you I was spooked, and I tore off to that lookout, a mile and a half, and I made record time. And when I once got in the lookout I was just perspiring, boy I'm telling you. And that lookout was on the ground, and that bothered me, it wasn't up on stilts.

FC: It didn't chase you though?

CM: Well, he ended up in my dump; he followed me all the way, stayed at the lookout. He hit the dump and you could see—it snowed about 2 mornings later—and you could see where he'd lay on his back and hold that damn bottle with his paws up in the air and licked catsup out of that catsup bottle, and, golly, he got...must have got his tongue way down in there, it just looked like a dishwasher cleaned it out almost, you know. And he was a big bear; I measured his bed and I didn't believe it had melted out, but it looked close to 8 feet long. I mean it was 8-foot grizzly. Tip to nose to tip to tail. It was a massive. That's a record for bears.

FC: They're all massive anyway.

CM: But, but this was no...this was no minor bear. So I ran out of food up there. I stayed up there quite awhile; I stayed there until damn near the...Well, until I had to go to school. And I went down to the cabin to get some grub, and it snowed, and I...When I went down the hillside in lodgepole I'm sure I was in a foot and a half of snow. And I didn't have any boot grease, so I had poured bacon grease in the cracks of my shoes to try to seal them a little bit—marvelous thing to do in grizzly country. And I came back up following my back track, and my gosh, there was bear tracks right in my tracks, following me right in my tracks in that snow. And, of course, his belly's dragging in the snow. And I can remember I walked up on a little five-, six-point—he wasn't a big elk, a big bull—laying there right on the hillside. He never even saw me. It was snowing and he was just laid there. I came back up and, boy, I was really checking my back track all the time for that damn grizzly. And then he must have got ideas with that snow to go find a place to sleep because I don't remember seeing—other than maybe the next day or two I saw some tracks around the lookout. And I only saw him, in truth saw him, to look at him, that night—that night I came back from that fire I never found.

FC: Also that night while you were sleeping isn't it?

CM: Oh, boy, I think I jumped from bed with my boots on, boy, I tell you, put a chair against the door and hoped like hell he wouldn't come up and visit me! Geez! That's one thing—no gun there. That's really a very helpless feeling. But those were the...Those Yellowstone days were great—the best. I certainly enjoyed my jumps out of Missoula. I enjoyed that one year I came back from jumping Yellowstone and we jumped a fire up at White Sands Creek.

FC: What year now?

CM: I have a little trouble remembering White Sands, if that was—what year that was—if that was...it was 6 or 7, '56 or '57. Ray Parker jumped it, I remember Ray and Roger McGirth, he's Forest Service at Plains, and geez I used to...I've got all...I've got those guys names written down. I wish I could remember them all. Kraut was on it; Kraut was the boss. And we jumped in a meadow at the head of White Sands Creek, and, oh, beautiful country. And there's a big cliff you got out over and you had to pull out into the meadow. The only one that almost didn't make it was Parker I can remember, Ray Parker. And I can remember watching these guys on their C-rations throwing all their crackers away. And god, it got socked in, and they couldn't bring a plane in for any food; all we had was in our packs. And there were...And Lucky MacPherson always rat-holed everything, I never threw anything away. Boy those guys. I always got hungry anyway. I was always hungry. And boy, I tell I saw—that's the first time I ever saw men going around on the ground picking up soggy...because it was...it started to rain. Crackers were wetm and they were picking up piece of cracker off the ground and eating them.

FC: Yeah, I've done that. Why didn't Parker quite make it?

CM: Chute handling, I think, personally. I don't think he'd read, you know...I don't think...sometimes you don't pay attention to [unintelligible]. You can't beat watching those drift streamers. If you got a wind, you got to get turned around and get in where you want to be.

FC: I don't quite understand...He's already a jumper. What do you mean he didn't make it then?

CM: He didn't quite make the spot. He made the spot on edge in the trees but he almost didn't make it over that Rock Creek cliff there.

FC: So he...okay.

CM: He made it but it—he ended up very marginal area to jump when you had a beautiful jump spot.

FC: Yeah.

CM: But I can remember he was one of the last guys to jump, and we were a little frightened of it. Yeah, but that was...that was a neat fire. Then I remember another fall fire we jumped was Kintla Lake.

FC: Where is that?

CM: That's north of the Glacier Park up by the Canadian border. And that was a neat fire. We jumped...think we jumped about 40 guys I think—I don't know. We jumped a lot of guys in there. Pulled guys out of school to jump that; we were into college already a week or two. And I'd rigged...I'd done, rigged, a lot, and I can remember one of the chutes I'd rigged, Tom Uphill had it on, the damn thing opened up inside out, inverted, so it steered backwards, and we jumped real high, we came over this huge granite peak. And, oh, it was a—not a tree on it for hundreds of feet, you know, just like a rock sticking up there. And we probably jumped about 2500 feet, we were in air 2-and-a-half, 3 minutes, and you looked down at the ground and you saw these little rocks, well some of those little rocks were big enough to—as big as a house, small house, some of those rocks were. You could have landed on one of them, but then you'd have to figure how you going to make a let-down off a rock.

FC: [laughs] Yeah.

CM: On that Kintla Lake fire it was a fire—a hunter-caused fire. And—

FC: What year was that?

CM: '57.

FC: '57.

CM: And I can remember...I remember Mohland was on there, Hank Mohland, Hank's dead now, and Uphill, and whose that other crazy, crazy Canadian? You made a lot of good friends, you know, Uphill ended up helping me pack an elk out one year—out of the rattlesnake. [laughs] But that was a nice fire, and I can remember sleeping at camp. And I can't remember who I bedded down with; we went out...we went down off on a hillside to lay down and found a flat spot. And at night after fighting fire all night and D. Dutton was...Bullethead Dutton [laughs] was foreman. And I'll be damned the guy I was sleeping by got up and got out, and they all ate breakfast and took off. No one ever woke me up, and I slept through everything. And funny thing—well, I had trouble sleeping the night before because we were by the guy's mules, and there's something about laying on the ground with a bunch of mules around—tends to keep you a little nervous. And I didn't wake up and I heard something, and I didn't even put my socks on, pulled my boots—pants and boots on—ran through the trees up to the trail, and hell everyone's going out. I hollered at them, told them I'd be along. I think I walked 4 or 5 miles [laughs] before I ever got my socks inside my boots. [laughs] But caught up to them, and I hadn't had a chance to eat. We hit the Forest Service cabin down in upper Kintla—I think it was upper Kintla. No, maybe we walked around upper Kintla. It might have been lower Kintla; there's two, upper and lower. Anyway, there's a cabin in one of them and there was an old timer there, packer or some damn thing, Forest Service man, made a heck of a breakfast for me. I can remember that. I was the only one. [laughs] So I...they had to take us across the lake by boat so Dutton says, 'Well why don't you [laughs] stay and eat.' Which didn't hurt my feelings. So I ate about three, four eggs and ham and hash browns, drank a half pot of coffee, and went on the last load out. But awfully good trip. Awfully good trip because real memorable times—special. You kind of wish you could remember more of the guys. It's going to be great seeing them. Let's see, you asked me about any accidents or near calls.

FC: Hairy, hairy experiences or near misses.

CM: Yeah, well we had one that was dandy. We got a pilot in '63 when we—our other plane—we were flying a twin Beech, and it hadn't been modified too much from—it was a convert. It was a C-45, I believe, or maybe it was whatever the Navy called them. But it was—

FC: [inaudible] the SNB.

CM: Yeah, that's what it was. It was...It was a Navy ship, and we were dropping jumpers on them. It had a high...No, it had a low...a low tail so that when you came in you couldn't see the ground, when you touched down you just felt for it. And on a strip like we were landing, a short strip, that was a little frightening. And the guys name was Tommy Thompson.

FC: Was that the pilot?

CM: Pilot, pilot. I jumped with a guy by the name of Tommy, T.J., Tommy Thompson, he's a crazy little bugger too. But, anyway, Thompson, the pilot, was getting checked out in the

aircraft, and we were up...And we made a flight with him. We were coming in and...I can't remember. Let's see, would that have been Trankle up front in the cockpit with him and this red light is on. And come to find, we were going to touch down and we didn't have landing gear down. So they...so he saw it in time, and he still had plenty of power and we tore ass out of there, pulled off the top of those lodgepole, got out there. And we...the gear was up by then, and got the gear down and came around again and landed. But that could have been a little frightening. But no, you know, the...thank god I never...I never...I don't think other than I got hurt hitting a tree. I broke this left ankle, but it was never diagnosed because in those days they sent you to doc that could see you right away. They didn't send you to a good specialist.

FC: You ever—

CM: I, my injury influenced them a lot on getting them to a good doctors. I resented that; I thought we should go to the best doctors in town.

FC: Well sure.

CM: And then, of course, my last year jumping I jumped up on Grays Peak with Darell Peterson, the principal—good friend. We jumped ten new jumpers, there was a kid by the name of Kappernick from Seattle—wonder if I'll get to see him again. But Kappernick caught up to me on the trail, he says, 'You're really hurting, aren't you?'

And I said, Yeah,' I says.

'The knee?'

And I said, 'Yeah, I don't know what the hell's wrong,' but I said, 'thing's burned.' And I'd just landed on a hillside there [inaudible]. In fact, I've killed elk there since...It's not too far; awfully far from where I live. And it was steep grassy hillside, but I didn't get hurt when I landed, but there was something wrong with that knee. It...I must have wrenched it or done something and I finally told Darrell, I says, 'Hey, we stop the next time I ain't going to stop with you because when I stop I get so stiff in that knee.' And it was just hot and swollen, so I know how the jumpers tended to feel about injuries, you know; any time you got hurt you always screwed up. It wasn't the fact that you were doing a dangerous job and that someone could get dinked. And Henry Viche, who's a patient of mine...You know I treat Cooley, Bud Moore, Henry Viche, Henry—Hank deSilvia when he was alive...I mean—

FC: Ernie.

CM: Ernie deSilvia when he was alive, and Wanda when she was alive, and...Hell, I treat Locky Stewart's widow and Fred Bauer. I treat all my bosses, you know, and...But Hank Viche was hardnosed about that kind of thing. He's old Forest Service, you know, and by golly he wanted to...He didn't want the Forest Service to have to pay for that surgery, so I...what I did rather

than go through the chain of command and stuff, I went down and I saw an orthopedic surgeon. I went down and saw McKenstry. And I said, 'What the hell's wrong?'

He says, 'Well, your knee's all messed up, all tore up in there. You...you're going to have some problems.'

I said, 'Well, I want to hunt elk and chase coyotes and do my thing later in life, want to be able to play handball when I'm 60. Will I be able to do it?'

He says, 'Hell, no, you be cripple.'

And I says, 'Well, when can you schedule it?' So I dropped a bunch of jumpers. I'd been a squad leader now for—by then a couple of years I guess—and I dropped a load over there in the Nez Perce, came in, made out my fire reports, and went right to the hospital the night I was supposed to be there, got admitted, and—

[End of Audio]