

Interview of Philip B. Stanley by Roxanne Farwell.  
Smokejumper Oral History Project. July 3, 1984. OH #133-99.

RF This is Roxanne Farwell of the Smokejumpers Oral History Project interviewing Philip Stanley at his home 7:30 P.M. July 3, 1984.

RF First, um, some biographical data. How old are you?

PS Sixty-five in April, last April.

RF And where were you born?

PS Ti Phon, Ho Nan Province in China.

RF What was your family's occupation?

PS Dad was a Y.M.C.A. missionary working with Chinese students.

RF And, ah, so when did you first come to Missoula?

PS 1943 to... for the smokejumper program. Middle of May, I think it was, May 15, 1943.

RF OK Had you done any kind of work before being trained as a smokejumper?

PS Any kind of... what kind of work?

RF What was your occupation if you...?

PS Oh, ah, mainly I'd been a photographer and photo finisher then. Aerial photography also, but primarily photography in its various branches.

RF Um huh, did you have any fire fighting experience?

PS No, no.

RF [laughs] And had you been working in the C.P.S. previous to, um...?

PS Oh, yes. We came from the Patapsco, Maryland, camp, where I'd been about a year I guess before I came to California. And we were there about nine months before we came to Missoula.

RF OK, what was the nature of the C.P.S. work that you did previous to becoming a smokejumper?

PS In Maryland we working in a tree nursery, digging up trees and transplanting them. In California, Coleville, Ca... right on the Nevada border, we were working train, clearing trail for the Forest Service. Work of national importance. Or, as the Southerners like to say "national impotence."

RF [laughs] OK. So why did you decide to apply for the smokejumping positions?

PS Well that involves a little history I guess. I'd heard about the project in California, and I don't remember the source of the information. But I got to badgering our Forest Service engineer there, Ray Brighting, to find out more information about it. And he finally gave in and got me the names of people to write. So I did, thinking that we may be able to do something in the way of smokejumping. He gave me the name of Axel Lynn who was... what did they call him. Ah... fire chief, I think here in Missoula. I wrote him and he responded saying there was some chance that they'd be able to use some of us. I also wrote my brother who was working for the N.S.B.R.O.. Which is what? National Service Board for Religious Objectives in Washington at the time, and he started working from the other end with the American Friend Service Committee, and I guess the two-pronged attack paid off, because eventually the Forest Service decided they could use some of us. And luckily enough, I was included as... as one of the volunteers.

RF So you were among the first of the C.O.'s then to train?

PS Yes. They brought about six or eight of us here in the middle of May, 1943, to be riggers... to train as parachute riggers. And I was one of those, yes.

RF So you trained to be a rigger first and then somewhere later you were trained as a jumper?

PS Yes, I think the rigger training started about two weeks ahead of the jump training. We got that first and then we started jump training after everybody else arrived.

RF O.K., how many people were in the group when you trained?

PS Oh, boy. You better ask Earl Cooley, or somebody that has a memory for figures... I think it was, 35 or 40, that first year.

RF Were they all C.O.'s?

PS Yeah, except for supervisory personnel, they were Forest Service.

RF Yeah, ah, when you were toying with the idea of... of becoming a smokejumper, did your family have any sort of reaction to that? Did they... what did they think of that kind of work?

PS My family consisted of two brothers, who were also C.O.'s,; Dad and Mother, who didn't know about it until after the fact, so I don't know quite how to answer that question.

RF That's fine [laughs]. What were the advantages to the smokejumping program that you saw? You know, I guess I'm trying

to find out... you expressed some interest in becoming a smokejumper but I'm trying to find out the... why it was you were really interested in that. Because it is pretty hazardous work.

PS Well I think that's the key to it. It's probably hard for you to imagine our frame of mind at the time. We had a very popular war going on. We were very unpopular. We had to prove ourselves. We had to prove we weren't yellow. We weren't scared. We wanted to do something that was important besides clearing trails. I think it's very basic. Very simple. We had to prove our manhood.

RF What was involved in... in your training? We could start with rigger training.

PS You mean... oh, the rigger training? Oh, oh, oh.

RF What... what does it... what did it entail?

PS How to pack a parachute, of course. Be very meticulous and very careful, how to pack it. How to repair them, because there were made of silk at the time. Grasshoppers just loved them. If you left them on the ground too long, you'd have hundreds of holes eaten in them by the grasshoppers. Make sure they were serviceable, and packed properly, and ready to jump.

RF Did you pack... as rigger were you learning how to pack main chutes or... I guess I'm also thinking of the reserve chute?

PS Reserves? Both. Oh, yeah.

RF What was involved in your... in your jumper training?

PS Calisthenics, physical conditioning, ah... of course exit from the plane. Do everything safely. Watch out for the other guy. Make sure all the equipment was well maintained and serviceable, ready to use. But I think the Forest Service [laughs]... the Forest Service principle was to get you so stiff from physical conditioning that you couldn't even wiggle, and by then you were ready to jump.

RF [laughs] I've heard about some of the things like, mock ups and, ah... let downs, and... and things like that. Now the let down was to simulate getting yourself out of a tree.

PS Tree landings. Yeah.

RF Um, did these... these units or these... these types of training really simulate what you were going to experience?

PS Oh, yes, very definitely. Of course, we only had two mock ups, because we were only using two planes at the time. Travelaire and a Trimotor. But they taught you how to get out of the door, how to put your foot on the step, make a decent exit from the plane. And, of course, let downs, taught you how to get

out of the tree which is extremely valuable at times. I think the first death occurred in a let down, after the war, over in Oregon someplace. I think it was a black man, (of course they were negroes at the time), that came to the end of his rope and let it pay out through his harness and he fell the rest of the way. So yes, it's extremely valuable training [laughs].

RF How long did the physical training last?

PS I don't remember. Seemed like ages but it was probably only about six weeks. As I recall that first year at Seeley Lake we were waiting for rain to quit. Waiting for it to dry up enough to jump.

RF Did, um... had a question ready, I forgot it... um, at the end of your training session was there any kind of a... oh, what do I want to say... initiation period, or anything like that, ah, to inaugurate you as a jumper. Did the older jumpers put you through some... any sort of a hazing or anything like that?

PS No, I don't recall any experience like that at all, no, we were just so happy to be on the way, we were looking forward not backward.

RF And when did you get fire fighting training then?

PS Oh, well, sure. This was all part of the physical conditioning. Running compass courses, learning how to dig a... a shoestring trench down to mineral earth, and this sort of thing, came along with the physical conditioning. Oh, yeah, it was all part of it. Smokejumping is just another way to get to a fire. In spite of all the glamour that people attach to it; it's just another way to get to a fire.

RF Kind of an unusual way though. [laughs]

PS Yeah, it was then.

RF Now, you had practice jumps during your training period, didn't you?

PS Yes.

RF OK. Can you tell me how you felt before the very first practice jump? What were some of the things that ran through your mind when you were getting ready for that?

PS Scared to death. But I think with all the training we had and all the physical conditioning and psychological conditioning too, we would have jumped no matter what [laughs] On that first one. It's the second and third jumps that get you. [laughs] About that time you begin to think "What the devil am I doing up here," you know, "I proved I can do it, [laughs] "Why practice?"

RF Do you remember anything from the jump, um, you're in the

plane getting ready to go out?

PS Just an... nothing specific... just an extreme feeling of terror to begin with. And exhilaration after you get out of the plane. Everything is so quiet and serene, and you know you've done it. You've been wondering all this time whether you could or not, and you've finally done it. What a feeling of relief.

RF Were... were you relieved as you were coming down closer to the ground and figuring out how to deal with the landing or was that any problem?

PS Oh, um... there was lots of time to consider the landing later, [laughs] you just enjoyed the ride down

RF Could you describe for me your first fire jump, in as much detail as you can?

PS First one... I'm not sure I can... I don't think I remember the first. I remember a couple of memorable ones, but I don't remember which ones they were. Want to hear about those?

RF Sure, that was my next question [laughs].

PS Oh. Yeah, I think I remember the first one. It was over in Idaho. [laughs] Jumped with Dave Flaccus and Lyle Zimmerman I think and worked about 24 hours on the fire. Got a shoestring trench around it, and then we were relieved by smokechasers that came in on foot. And we hiked out to Pierce, Idaho, Ranger Station... Pierce, Idaho, and it looked like a stage set with wooden sidewalks and dirt streets and the whole bit. And the ranger there, I think his name was McDonald, couldn't believe the sight of us. And me mainly because I was dressed in a blue denims which were just becoming... which were a work clothes at the time. They weren't fashionable at all. And they were kind of ragged. I'd burned some holes in them, and the cuffs were torn, they'd been patched, and a few things like that. And he really felt sorry for me and I thought I was pretty well outfitted. [laughs] So he tried to get me some decent clothes. [laughs] I mean decent to his standards, I thought I was [laughs]... I was well outfitted.

RF He knew you were a smokejumper.

PS Yeah, and we'd done our job, who cares what we looked like, you know. But he was the salt of the earth. He did his best and he got us back home over the old Lolo Trail which hadn't been carved out at the time. It was just a one lane Forest Service road. But that was the first one. I had a hard time remembering that one. Other jumps stood out much better. Like the one over in Oregon; where we landed in 120 foot tall trees, and some of the boys weren't lucky enough to get to the ground. They hung up right in the tops of the trees. I was still jumping an Eagle at the time, which is a lot more steerable, a lot more manageable.

RF An Eagle parachute?

PS Yes, we were in the process of switching from Eagles to Irvins at the time. An Irvin is a spherical canopy, an Eagle is much more steerable, but it has a much harder opening shock so a lot of the guys avoided them. And I can't say as I blame them. But once you opened and lived through the opening shock you could put them where you wanted to go, which I did. I landed on the ground. And some of the guys were still 120 feet up in the air. And, of course....

RF How long was their rope, their let down rope?

PS Oh, well they didn't need a let down at all, they could climb down the branches of the tree. Except they'd better have the rope with them, some of the last branches were still 20 and 25 feet off the ground, they had to let down from the last branch. And, of course, that presented a problem getting them out again because we had to retrieve the chutes, they were not expendable. They were extremely valuable because you couldn't get any more.

RF What happened if you came back without your chutes?

PS I don't think anybody did. They probably would have been shot right on the spot. [laughs] You just didn't do that.

RF What sort of shape were they in after... what was... a silk chute in a tree? Did you have to do a lot of repair work on it afterwards?

PS Surprisingly little, they were very durable. It was very closely woven material, of course, and silk is tough. It will snag and pull, but it won't be damaged at all. Speaking of repair, we got a bunch of Army Navy reject chutes. They were nylon at the time. And Irvins... when was it... must have been the winter of '44 because we were running so short. They'd been rejected by the Army and Navy and we fixed them up in jumpable condition in our loft down there on Alder Street.

RF Any other memorable jumps?

PS For any reason at all?

RF Sure.

PS You bet. I don't remember what year it was anymore. I think it must have been '44 or '45, we were jumping on a fire down the Salmon River country, late in the day. As a matter of fact, two of us had just come back from another jump, and we were supposed to be rotating and, of course, that rotation was extremely guarded, extremely jealously. Everybody wanted their chance to jump and they didn't want to miss it. The two of us had been returned to the [Inaudible] Hotel after a jump, and we'd just gotten cleaned up, and we were resting on the couch, and

looking forward to enjoying a couple of days off, and they got a fire call. And the... the guys that were on call were out at the fair grounds, right next to the airport. Which was Hale Field, of course, at the time. And not available. So what did they do but come back to the [Inaudible] Hotel and grab everybody that was available which included the two of us who had just gotten back. And we weren't about to say no. [laughs] But our jumpsuits and our parachutes hadn't arrived back yet from the fire so we scrounged up a couple of outfits, nothing seemed to fit, but we managed. And got off... took off in the Trimotor, flew down to the Salmon River country just above Mackey Bar, and jumped late in the day. It was just ready to get dark, must have been 9:00 in the evening. Jumped on a fire that was burning in nothing. There didn't seem to be anything flammable on the side of that hill but it was still burning. It was just goat rock and... and short grass. Jumped on that fire and worked on it all night long. Asked for a Pacific Marine pump from, um... McCall. (Geez, memories the first thing to go.) From the base in McCall, Idaho. And I remember the squad leader saying that they couldn't get the Marine pump out that evening to bring it out the next morning, first thing, first light. And they acknowledged... McCall acknowledged the message. So we never got the pump that evening, we had a stream right at the bottom of the hill we could have pumped water out of. That wasn't the message at all, the squad leader said "ship the pump... bring the pump today, or if you can't get it today, forget it. Don't bring it tomorrow..." that was it. So we didn't get it that evening, first light the next morning the Travelaire came over and dropped us a pump. Well, of course, it was never taken out of the manty, it was put right back up on a mule and hauled out, we never got a chance to use it. But after working on it all night long we got it surrounded pretty well and started to hike out, probably about noon the next day to Mackey Bar where a Trimotor was due to pick us up. It must have been 20 or 25 miles down the river to Mackey Bar so we spent the night along the river. And that country is filled with rattlesnakes, of course. For some reason I was breaking trail, and we were all dead tired, and I had my head down just looking at the tops of my shoes, and I remember my left foot coming up with a rattler stretched across the trail right where my left foot was going to come down, and I don't ever remember putting that foot down again, but I must have. And the rattler disappeared off into the brush, he didn't want any part of me either. But then we spent the night along side the stream and worried about rattlers crawling in the bedrolls with us because they seek warmth. Luckily I don't think anybody did. But on the way out we ran into a poor old farmer down there that had a gorgeous fruit orchard. He had just about everything you'd want. Apricots, peaches, pear, cherries, lamberts, and beans, anything you wanted and it's just dead ripe. He couldn't get it to market, so he said "help yourselves." And we just got in there and made pigs out of ourselves. One poor guy loaded up a box maybe two and a half feet long of cherries and carried them out on his back, trying to get them home. And jogging down that trail for another ten miles they just turned to juice. [laughs] The back of his legs didn't look very good by the time he got to

Mackey Bar and he had to... hardly had anything left by the time he got out. But that's the kind of thing you remember, not the danger or... or the tough job of fighting fire, it's the... it's the unusual experiences, the comraderie sort of thing that stick in your memory.

RF Any characters that you remember, some...?

PS Lots of them, everyone's a character, I love characters.

RF I run across a lot of nicknames in my reading. [laughs]

PS Oh, is that right? Oh, everyone was a character in one way or another. Where does that question lead?

RF Wherever you want it to. [laughs] Can you recall the, ah, about the longest period that you worked somewhat continuously in fire, that you were called out again?

PS Yeah, I sure can. Fact I think it was this... just before this Salmon River fire, I just described to you. No, it couldn't be because we were up at Nine Mile at the time. We were working up at Nine Mile on a hay crew. And if you're familiar with those old horse trucks the Forest Service had, they were huge. They held a whole pack string, nine mules and a horse. Ten head of stock. Four men could sit abreast in the cab. 365 horse power Hall-Scott engines in them I remember that. And we were loading baled hay into these trucks. We were... we were cutting the hay and baling it, and loading the bales into the trucks for transport somewhere... I don't know where they went. But a couple of guys would operate the baler, another would buck the bales over to the tailgate of the truck, another guy in the truck would take the bale from the tailgate and stack it in the truck. And we'd been doing that all day long. At least all afternoon, maybe all day. And I remember one guy got sick or prostrated with the heat, I don't remember what his problem was, but I doubled that job. I jumped down, put the bale up on the tailgate and then stacked it in the truck until dinner. We quit for dinner and went to eat and got a fire call right in the middle of dinner. We didn't get a chance to finish dinner, and went and jumped on a fire, and worked all night on that fire. Yeah, we were pretty freaked by then.

RF About how many fires did you... did you work?

PS Let's see, probably a dozen all together, not very many.

RF They were all ones that you jumped?

PS Yes.

RF Of those, were the smokejumpers the first ones?

PS Yeah, every one... every one that I was on. Yes.

RF And, ah, were there any that the smokejumpers were the only ones fighting the fire, nobody else was able to make it in or got there before you guys finished up?

PS Well nobody got there before we did. Of course, that was the whole concept of smokejumping, to be the first strike force. But there were... there were other fire fighters. Oh, sure. There were the so called smokechasers, that came in to relieve us, uh huh.

RF So you usually would get the fire under control, someone else would... the ground crews would come in and then...?

PS ... would do the mop up, right.

RF OK, yeah. Were your jumps mainly in the Montana, Idaho area or... you said you had one in Oregon?

PS Mainly Montana and Idaho, mainly in the panhandle of Idaho. As I understand it there's a real lightning belt right through the panhandle of Idaho. That's where I wound up jumping most of the time, yeah. I forgot about your tea, it should be ready.

RF Thank you.

[INTERRUPTION]

RF You mentioned how you were really... it seemed like you really looked forward to being called on a jump, ah, to get the chance to jump a fire, and... and why was that? Was there extra pay for fires you jumped?

PS You've got to be kidding -- pay? [laughs] We weren't paid. You didn't know that? [laughs] No, there wasn't any pay involved. We had a \$2.50 allowance per month. There wasn't any pay involved in jumping, no. I think it was what I described earlier, it's proving our manhood. We wanted to be able to do something that would get people's attention. Prove that we weren't yellow. Prove that we could do something valuable. Contribute to the welfare of the country that wasn't destructive, or that involved maiming and killing. I think it was all of that.

RF So...?

PS We were on the defense. We were very defensive.

RF Uh huh, so you jumped twelve jumps and then the rest of the time you would be in... and through the winter you did other conservation projects or...?

PS Yeah, make work projects. [laughs] Yes. Involved cutting a lot of fire wood, just to keep ourselves warm, um hum.

RF And did rigging take a fair amount of time?

PS Not in the winter. In the summer it did, yes.

RF Were all the CO's... were all your fellow jumpers, riggers?

PS No, there must have been about eight or ten of us all together, I think the original crew was about six,, and they kept adding a few later on. But there's an interesting aspect of that, too. Frank Derry, of course, was our jump trainer and rigger trainer came down pretty hard on us because some of the guys began looking at the logs packed with every parachute to see who had packed it. They had more faith in some riggers than other riggers, in their ability to pack it. So they began looking for the initials of their favorite rigger. And, of course, Frank Derry came down pretty hard on that. He made us... made all the jumpers quit it right away, because if you can't trust one rigger you can't trust any of them.

RF So as a jumper you didn't necessarily jump your own chute that you packed, you mean?

PS Well, of course, some of us did. [Laughs] You weren't supposed to.

RF OK. I know in sport parachuting anybody packs their own main, but that wasn't true in the smokejumping, the riggers packed the mains, too?

PS No, no, no, if the parachute is packed properly it doesn't matter who packed it.

RF [laughs] You packed the reserves, but did you ever get to see any chance when they were used, was there any time when you... were the reserves used often?

PS I don't recall any incident where they were used because they had to be, they were opened accidentally occasionally, in fact it happened to me once. I can't recall any other incident where anybody had to open their reserve. I'm so big, I had trouble getting out of the Travelaire. The door was so small. And I would invariably hook the top of my backpack on the top of the door of the Travelaire and go spinning head over heels, which didn't make for a good opening position. And I was determined on a practice jump, up there at Six Mile, to miss that doggone door. So I rolled out. And in the process of rolling I had my arms crossed over the reserve chute, when the main chute opened my arms pulled the D ring of the reserve chute up and opened it accidentally, it pulled the flaps back but the... the canopy stayed right there in it's pack. I looked down after I'd checked my main canopy to make sure it was opened properly, and then looked down. Saw this thing ready to fall. And that can be disastrous, because you aren't falling fast enough for it to catch the air and it can come up and surround you, and tangle you all up. So I quick slapped an arm down over it to keep it from falling and then got to thinking, "What's it like to have two

sheets out?" So I grabbed a handful of the silk and threw it as hard as I could and it caught the air. And it's completely unmanageable. You... you have two chutes sticking out at a 90 degree angle, one catches the wind like a sail, and you just go with it. You, ah... you can't manage them at all. But it was sure fun.

RF [laughs] But you never saw a malfunction of that kind... you?

PS Define malfunction.

RF OK, I'm thinking of some of the things I've heard about like, ah... Mae Wests, the line overs...

PS Uh huh, line overs. Oh, yes.

RF ... and another word I've heard is streamer when the chute doesn't open but it's out of the... out of the backpack but not open.

PS But every streamer I've seen has eventually opened, in time. And a line over, or a Mae West, is not that serious because it doesn't increase your rate of descent seriously at all. It looks terrible, it looks dangerous. I really can't tell you much about hairy situations, I've never had any trouble at all to speak of.

RF Sounds good.

PS You ought to talk to some of the guys it happened to.

RF But you didn't see anything like that happen at all?

PS Oh, yeah, sure, we saw line overs and streamers but nothing serious. You asked about reserve chutes, good grief, how could I forget? We were on a practice jump over Six Mile out of a Trimotor. They had asked me to... Vick Carter had asked me to take some pictures. Of course, I was unofficial photographer the whole time aside from the jumping activities. And I was up right behind the co-pilot in the Trimotor, leaning out the window to get some pictures of the guys leaving the plane, their chutes opening, and on the way down, Ed... oh, we just started to use these new snap hooks. Spring loaded snap hooks that snapped onto the anchor line...

RF You're talking about the static line?

PS ... static line, right. And everybody was supposedly familiar with the action of them, except Ed Carlson apparently didn't get his anchored on. Didn't get it snapped... anchored into place. And the guy in front of him jumped and bounced Ed Carlson's hook off the static line. So when Ed jumped his static line trailed out the door right after him. Earl Cooley nearly jumped right after him. He leaned so far out the door to yell at Ed to "Pull it, pull it, pull it!" pull his emergency chute, I

thought Earl was going to go right down with him. But Ed kept falling, he's kind of... was, I guess he's gone now. A slow, good natured, good humored, Swede. He said afterward that he was falling head first and the wind caught his jacket and inflated the thing and he couldn't find his emergency. So he finally pushed that down with one hand and found his emergency with the other hand... his D ring with the other hand, and finally got it open, he oscillated about twice and he was down. But everybody thought he was just going to bore right into the ground.

RF That's a malfunction, isn't it?

PS Of what man or equipment?

RF [laughs] I don't know.

PS Both, yeah.

RF It seems like it. Were injuries common in...?

PS Minor injuries, I think, were. Yeah. Sprained ankles. A few broken bones, not many. I think they were very minor, nothing serious. Injuries were mainly from volleyball and project.

RF [laughs] OK. Now were you still jumping when some of the returning vets were coming back and...?

PS No, no, they, ah, made a clean sweep... let's see 1945 was our last summer, I guess '46 was a complete change of personnel.

RF So you didn't get a chance to interact with many of them at all.

PS Not as jumpers, no. Later on as acquaintances.

RF Uh huh. How did they feel about... about the C.P.S. program?

PS That's hard to generalize... generalize it... generalize.

RF And... Public Service smokejumpers....

PS I think as a generality we got more understanding and sympathy from veterans than we did from non-veterans. The veterans attitude seemed to be that they wouldn't do it again. A lot of their time was... they thought was wasted. Maybe even....

RF You mean in the war?

PS Yes. Their time in the service. Maybe even the cause was not just... I don't know... I'm... I'm on shaky ground here. That's a general impression they left me with.

RF Well I know that... or I had heard that... at the smokejumper reunions, that the CO's usually have there own... they... or that's what I've heard.

PS Well what's the implication here?

RF Ah.

PS Sure we do.

RF Whether it was some sort of harsh feelings between the two groups.

PS Oh, no. I don't think so at all. Oh, no. It's comradarie, I think, that promoted that. We were a distinct segment. War years only. Why would a high school intermingle reunions? Why would a college? They go by classes, by years. No, I don't think there's any... any basis in that at all.

RF Well at the end of the war did you feel as though you wanted to keep on jumping?

PS Not at all.

RF Oh. [laughs]

PS Not at all.

RF And your co-jumpers, did they seem to feel the same way, do you think or...?

PS That's pretty hard to answer, because I really don't know, I would guess that everybody felt about... about the way I did. They wanted to get back, ah...

RF Did you?

PS ... back to their pre-war existence, back to putting a life together. They considered the war years a hiatus. An interruption.

RF So without the war there wasn't really the need to prove... prove yourselves.

PS Right.

RF ... the way you were speaking.

PS And most of us had been four years without income, it was getting pretty desperate.

RF So the loss of the CO's was a loss to the Forest Service, but as far as you as a group, you didn't feel as though you wanted to pursue it as a career.

PS No, I didn't, two of us, Bill Laughlin and I, thought seriously about setting up a... a rigging service somewhere in the country. I think it was going to be Ohio, somewhere. But

that didn't amount to anything.

RF Hum, I'm at the end of my tape here.

[END OF SIDE A]

[BEGIN SIDE B]

RF Well that's...

PS Of course we have our own mailing list. It would be pretty hard to get the inv... get the invitation out to anyone else. But, oh, this is hard to believe.

RF Well then... then, ah... we had noticed that the CO's that we had sent questionnaires to hadn't sent them back to the archives.

PS Yeah, I'm one of them.

RF And... and so, um... that was sighted as further evidence of the separation of the groups, the CO's from the vets. It's interesting when... when we're talking about the veterans attitudes, that... that they maybe were a bit unhappy with what they had done, too, and might have been more sympathetic to you.

PS This comes as a complete surprise and shock to me.

RF Sometimes I've heard smokejumpers called an elite corp. Did you have any of that feeling when you were working a fire or anything like that?

PS Oh, absolutely, we were the creme de la creme, you bet.

RF [laughs] And that was your attitude about yourselves or, um....

PS Yeah. You mean, did it come from other source?

RF How did the other fire fighters feel about you?

PS [laughs] That we were the best, and they resented it.

RF [laughs] Did they debate with you as to whether smokejumping was even needed?

PS No, I don't recall any discussion of that sort, no. But you've got to remember who was left to be anything other than a smokejumper. Like, a smokechaser. They were 4F's. They were under age. The dregs of manhood, just like we were [laughs]. Well let's face it Selective Service considered us unfit for military service.

RF I'd kind of like to come back to the question I asked earlier that fell flat on it's face. And that was any memorable

characters that... that, ah, you remember, that stand out.

PS Are you interested in names, or why they're characters, or what, ah...?

RF People that you remember that... that either just for certain things they did, or outstanding jumpers, or people who had unusual skills, anything.

PS Oh, sure. There's a whole bunch. This Bill Laughlin, I mentioned a little while ago. The two of us were talking about setting up a rigging service, is a... an outstanding archeologist, still is. Um, Ed Carlson, who took a nose dive and almost killed himself, was a big, slow, fun loving, Swede, used to take us into town in his old Chevrolet panel truck. Ah, who else? Dave Flaccus, still here in town, has Mountain Press Publishing Co., you've probably heard of him.

RF What do you remember him for?

PS Mainly his fishing ability and his good natured understanding of me, and everything that went on. Easy to get along with. We had similar backgrounds also. Who else? Lots of faces flash by, but it's kind of hard to categorize them.

RF Pretty favorable impressions.

PS Oh yes. Oh yes, all of them.

RF Then you... working as a group you... did you work well together, or...?

PS Oh yes, I can't remember any unfavorable. Of course that's my kind of memory, I guess. I think it's typical of most people, they tend to remember the pleasant incidents, not the unpleasant ones.

RF Now, your spotter on the flights, was he a jumper also or...?

PS Oh yes. Oh yes, they were all trained jumpers. Of course the spotters were all Forest Service personnel, yeah.

RF Uh huh, did you always have a good spot?

PS Every fire jump I recall was spotted very well, yes. The only problem I ever recall was on a practice jump up at Seeley Lake. The spotter had, ah... we were jumping into a pretty high wind to begin with. And, ah, the spotter was to intentionally take us too far past the jump spot so that we would have to slip the parachute, spill part of it in order to get down through the wind quickly. And he let us out much too early, instead of too late. So I had to do just the opposite of what we were told to do, and finally made it. But, ah, he didn't... [laughs]

RF So he...

PS And I won't tell you who it was.

RF He jumped that load, too?

PS He jumped, last, yes.

RF Oh, so he had to, um...?

PS Yes, he paid for his own mistakes, yes.

RF ... had to live with his spot.

PS Because he's still here in town [laughs].

RF [laughs] But mostly your spots were good.

PS Oh yes, very good. Forest Service men did an outstanding job.

RF What was about the average altitude that... that you jumped out at.

PS It's supposed to be 1000 feet, but depending on the terrain and how the pilot was flying it was pretty hard to judge. I remember one jump out of McCall, Idaho. Jungle Creek fire, I think it was. The pilot was flying parallel to the ridge... not... excuse me he was flying perpendicular to the ridge, so that a few seconds, plus or minus, would make a great deal of difference in the altitude which we jumped. And, ah... this spotter delayed a little too long... not on our jump, but on the jumpers that followed us. Our spotter did an excellent job, that was Art Cochran, I think, for that jump. But whoever the spotter was for the next crew, the next jump crew that came in, waited a little too long flying perpendicular to the ridge so that when he finally let them go they jumped at about 300 feet because their chutes just barely opened and they were on... down on the ground. We wondered if they'd make it at all, but they did, and nobody was hurt. That's the only incident I've ever seen or heard of that. was that close. And, of course, I guess the military jumps at 300 feet all the time, that's nothing unusual at all. The Forest Service has a great deal more respect for life and limb, thank goodness.

RF Yeah, it seems as though there was quite a few innovations in parachute technology, and as a result of the parachute project, the smokejumping project, which sport parachutists and all, seemed to have picked up.

PS Oh yes, the Army... I think it was the Army at the time because there wasn't an Air Force I don't think. Sent a... a group of jumpers to jump along side of us... must have been the summer of '45. And I was to take pictures and drive the ambulance for the project. We were going up to, um... what's this little

clearing just the other side of Blue Mountain? I can't think of it right off hand, but we were jumping in that area. I wasn't jumping the crew was jumping. And one of the sergeants, ah, Army sergeants, sprained his ankle on the first jump so he was riding with me in the ambulance and we got to talking and comparing notes on the Army chutes and our Derry slotted chutes. This is what they were primarily interested in this Derry steerable slot that Frank Derry had invented. But he got to telling me some... he got to telling me some fascinating stories about jumping. He'd just been through the Anzio invasion where Army pilots would not fly low enough in their DC-3's and expose the jumpers to ground fire on the way down and they jumpmasters who are the last ones to jump resented this so badly, that they were so high up, they would pull the pin from a grenade and throw it up in the cockpit just before they left the plane. I mean these were their own men. It was sickening to hear about it. He also told me how to get down through power lines.

RF Was that ever anything you had to be concerned with?

PS No, we never jumped anywhere near power lines, but they did. This is the irony of it, of course. He said their instructions were to keep your arms folded over your chest, keep you feet together, and turn your head to the left [laughs].

RF That's it?

PS That's it.

RF OK. [laughs] Don't say a prayer, or anything?

PS No, they just expected to loose 10% of their men.

RF Um, I'd read something about one type of a line of fire fighting technique that was invented, I guess, by the CO's and it was called the step up technique? Did you, ah... are you aware of that term?

PS I think I know what you mean.

RF Ah, each person takes one part of a line and works it, when he connects it with somebody else, bumps that person.

PS And you just keep moving on down the line. Yeah, you keep, ah, digging deeper and wider.

RF Was that something that came out of...?

PS I have no idea.

RF You used it?

PS Oh, sure.

RF OK.

PS I have no idea where it originated.

RF Well one source I read said it originated with the CO's so I was wondering if you were aware of that. Well is there anything else you'd like to tell me about your experiences or is there something I've neglected to ask... should have asked?

PS You've covered the field pretty well and I'm flattered that anybody wants to hear them. [laughs]

RF [laughs] Have to realize for the great majority of the population this is really... a unique experiences.

PS Yeah, but who wants to hear about it?

RF I do.

PS [laughs] Well you're different [laughs], you must be.

RF Well there's quite a few of us involved in this project that want to hear.

PS Oh, is that right? No I expect to have to cudgle my grandchildren into a corner in order to tell them about smokejumping.

RF Any other smokejumpers in the family?

PS No, no, Steve is not the least bit interested. Of course, Carol wouldn't be anyway, I guess. They've never taken women have they?

RF Um, well they...

PS Have they?

RF ... just recently, um huh, yeah.

PS Oh, what, how many, how long ago?

RF Ah, ah, a couple of years ago.

PS Oh, really, well it was too late for her anyway.

RF Now it's profitable, I suppose.

PS I hear the pay is pretty good, or can be, yes.

RF Well...

PS Depending on overtime.

RF Well, thank you very much.

PS Well, I think you've covered the field pretty well.

RF OK. Thank you... I appreciate.

[END OF INTERVIEW]