

Tim Eldridge  
Manager, Smokejumper Visitor Center, Former Smokejumper  
Smokejumper Base, Missoula, Montana

Interviewer: Bob Beckley  
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Bob Beckley {BB}: Tim, can you give us your name and spell it for us?

Tim Eldridge {TE}: Yeah, it's Timothy Gerald Eldridge, I go by Tim Eldridge. It's T-I-M E-L-D-R-I-D-G-E.

BB: Tim, How long have you been with the Forest Service? And can you talk a little bit about what brought you to the Forest Service, and your career?

TE: Sure. I started out with the Forest Service in 1975, in a small ranger district in western Montana, Thompson Falls Ranger District, which is now a combined ranger district with Plains, Montana. It's the Plains/Thompson Falls Ranger District now, but at the time it was just one ranger district and having grown up, being raised in that country, I was well aware of Forest Service activities in the area. My very, very good friend, Michael Allen, his father had been with the Forest Service. He was a career Forest Service man, and had been a smokejumper. He was also the local Forest Service fire prevention technician; he came to schools every year. It was very interesting to have him come to school and hand out Smokey the Bear comic books, just Smokey the Bear pencils, that sort of thing. As a young kid I remember him coming. One of the funny memories that I have about Norm Allen was that he would actually stand in front of the class and roll a ciguatera, right in the school. [Laughs] A roll your own cigarette, while he was giving his talk. But then of course he would wait and go outside to smoke it after he got done talking to us. But anyway, I think he was a kind of showing people how good he was at the expertise, the act of rolling these cigarettes. Anyway, I was born in 1956 in Hot Springs, Montana, on December 20<sup>th</sup>. And from my very earliest memories of living in Thompson Falls even before I started elementary school, I remember being aware of each summer fires around my home town, and the smoke that would sometimes come in and lay over the tops of trees of the town and sock it in, and I remember my parents and everyone talking about these fires. And one of my earliest memories of smokejumpers, beside Mr. Norm Allen, was probably one day when I was outside with my father in our backyard; very hot, hot summer day; I remember I was running around in no shoes, shorts, and I was probably about five years old. And this is a very powerful memory to me; it amazes me that I can have it so clearly in my mind that I remember seeing this fire behind my home town on Mount Wilcox. And asking my father, Dad, what's going on up there? Well that's just a forest fire. Well who started that? Was somebody smoking a cigarette? He said, no, no, that was started by lightning, Tim. And I was just trying to piece all this together as a five year old kid, that this fire was burning from lightning. How did lightning start this fire? And about an hour later after this fire had been burning rather intently, then I saw an airplane circling over. And I went into the house and grabbed my father and dragged him outside and said, What's the airplane going to do up there? Are they going to fight the fire? He said, I don't know. Let's watch. So we watched this airplane circle for many minutes, and

eventually these orange and white parachutes popped out of this airplane, and I asked my father, oh man! What's going on up there now? And he said, well those are smokejumpers, Tim. And I said, oh really? Like Norm Allen? He goes, Yeah. I said, oh wow. And he said, No you never want to be one of those, Tim. Those are the craziest bastards on earth.

And of course I thought right away, that's got to be one of the coolest jobs ever, to be a smokejumper and jump into a forest fire like that. And so I went through my school, elementary and middle school, junior high and high school, through Thompson Falls with the Forest Service being a part of my life because their office was right downtown, and I went with my buddy Mike to visit his father Norm at his office on occasion. Got to know a lot of the Forest Service personnel, and actually had a cousin who worked on the ranger district there as the saw crew supervisor; so he was on the brush disposal crew, and when I turned eighteen he encouraged me to apply to the Forest Service, to get on the fire crew. And the way he described it to me, there was a movie that he was very impressed with; it was called *Never Give an Inch*. It was based on one of Ken Kesey's books, about *Sometimes a Great Notion*. And Ken Kesey had written a book about these loggers in Oregon, who refused to go on strike, and half the town hated them, but they were just these rough and tumble...

[Camera stops for a moment.]

BB: Had to stop for a battery switch. We're back on now.

TE: So anyway, Norman wanted me to, his grand plan was, after drinking several beers with him one night, to apply to the Forest Service, he encouraged me to do that. Because he was going to be running the saw crew. He wasn't going to be running the saw crew, he was going to be running the local district fire crew, which was a group of six people. It was a smoke chaser position, basically. Well, we did have some engines, like two hundred and fifty gallons per engine. Two of those that we were going to be running, out of the fire office there that we staffed. We had six people, and my uncle was the boss. I did finally get on. I went to their office every day after I graduated from school, and just explained to them that I did really want to work in fire, that I wanted to become a smokejumper eventually at some point in my life. And I wasn't a big guy, I was about a hundred and forty pounds. Everybody else that got hired onto the crew was bigger than me and had more experience. I was a totally green fella coming off the street out of high school, eighteen years old. So my cousin Orin and I, we finagled it, and they actually hired me. And then split us, the six of us on the fire crew, into three groups of two. And since I was the green guy and Orin, he had the most experience, he kind rook me under his wing and I was his partner, so we had the same weekends off. At one point he was talking about how both of us would eventually become smokejumpers, and this is when I was referring to the Ken Kesey book, *Never give an Inch* I believe it was called... *Sometimes A Great Notion*, excuse me. But then they made a film out of it called *Never Give an Inch*. And it was about a big family that was very rough and tumble Oregon loggers, that the town, the community, where they worked went on strike. And he said, this is the type of people we're going to be when we get older. And I'm going, what are you talking about? [Laughs] We're not going to be loggers, we're going to be smokejumpers. And this is what's going to happen.. And I want you to get on this fire crew and do a good job, and so I continued to work on the fire crew with Orin that summer. Went through the entire summer and then Orin decided it might be interesting if he and I went out to Oregon, not to be ski bums. So we went out to Bend, Oregon, and skied at [Mount Patrick?] for the winter

and had grand plans for the next year. Well Orin had decided to apply for jumping in 1970, and it was 1976 and he did get accepted for the program. So I went back to the fire crew in Thompson Falls, Montana, to work seasonally for the next year as a smokechaser. Spent the entire summer chasing fires, learning more and more about the job itself. Also went to guard school, because when they hired me the year before, that year guard school had already been done with. It was over with. I ended up going to guard school at Bonita Ranger District east of Missoula. And it was supposed to be a five-day event, basically, and getting right up to the last day, there was a large fire that broke out north of Phoenix, Arizona, and they needed a bunch of us. So without even finishing guard school I ended up flying down the Arizona and going onto a huge fire called the [Sack?] fire, where we ended up being flown down at night, arriving in Phoenix at night, and then hiking to the fire about ten miles. I remember there was some smokejumpers on the crew with us, and one fellow in particular by the name of Lloyd Whittacker. We'd spent the entire night, the entire next day-- it's a hundred and probably fifteen degrees out-- running around trying to keep out of the way of this fire that was burning. It was running up the hills, through the flaps. And our boss was wanting us to make a run at it, go in and mop it up cold; he was screaming at us, "Get in and mop it up cold." You couldn't even stand in the sun much less go out into the hot coals. We ended up on the fire for several days, ended up going back to Phoenix after they released us. And stayed one night in Phoenix. I remember we left and came back for our home bases. The next several years were spent every summer working, and also the spring and the fall, working later each year in brush disposal on both ends of the fire season, where we'd go out and we were still owing down huge acreage of land to burn next fall. We did a lot of burning. There were humongous clear cuts that were cut in the late '60s, and at that time, it would depend on the FMO I suppose, but there were a lot of big units, and some of these units were so big that some of the FMOs I think were afraid to light them off, they were so humongous. I mean I'm talking twelve hundred to a thousand plus acres, some of the acres were. I know up in the Graves's Creek, in the Grave's Creek drainage northwest of Thompson Falls and north of Thompson's Falls in the Thompson Falls Ranger District in that drainage up there, there were just massive old clear cuts. We would try to go in. George [Stipe?] was out FMO and he was a guy that liked to burn. He really liked to see fire out in the woods. As long as it wasn't outside the unit he was pretty happy. And George was always a big supporter of me and my wishes to try to get into the smokejumper program. And George taught us a lot about being smokechasers. He was very old school, been a smokechaser for many years. In one particular incident I remember George sent myself and a fellow named Doug Gunderson to a fire. And I could see the fire from town; and it was on Mount Wilcox, the same place I could see the smokejumpers jumping when I was five years old. So anyway I got ahold of Doug and we got into our fire clothing and grabbed our fire shelters and out packs, and went up to the shop and grabbed our fire packs and put them in the back of the truck, and drove up as far as we could toward where the fire was, up on the mountain. There was no road up there, but I swear to death I could see the smoke coming through the trees, which I could. Doug and I hiked up; the mountain was very steep. It took us about two and a half hours to get up to where I swore the fire was at. And we searched all night long for the fire and could not find it. We had George [Stipes?] out on the highway, eight miles away from us, trying to direct us to the fire, which he kept swearing was on the back side of the ridge, which I swore was on the front side. Well what happened was the fire, which was burning on the far back side, was blowing over the ridge top, and the smoke was coming out on the other side of the ridge, which made it look like it was on the wrong side of the mountain. So I had to take most of the blame for swearing that George was

crazy and that we were not going to find the fire. We spent the night huddled around a small cook fire. Ate C-rations. A pound cake, and probably spaghetti and meat sauce. Had to use our old P-38s to open up, and cooked our food, and kind of huddled around this fire all night until about five-thirty in the morning when we got up, put out our camp fire, mopped it up; and while I was finishing that up Doug went and climbed a tree, and actually could see the smoke again. So we were all excited. So off we went, traipsing around the hillside for another two hours, and finally, using what I'd been taught to find a fire, I started using my notes. And I caught a whiff. And I kept looking and looking, and yelled for Doug that I could smell smoke. So he came traipsing across this steep hillside back toward me, and we went around the ridge where George told us to go. We got on the back side of the ridge and found the fire. Which was about thirty feet by forty feet. And if we'd probably been there a day ago it probably wouldn't have been quite as big [Laughs]. What had happened was, there was a great big Ponderosa pine, about three and a half feet in diameter that had been struck by lightning. And we lined the fire, started mopping it up. Pretty much took us about four hours of steady work to mop the fire up. And called up the ranger district and talked to Bob [Gappman?]. We asked him, okay Bob, we have this great big, great big Ponderosa pine. He asked us if it had been struck by lightning; we said, yes, there's a big lightning strike goes all the way down. Well, bring it down. Doug, of course, [wasn't interested in that]. He said, all we have are these [pulaskis?]. The captain said, that's okay [words inaudible], because it needs to come down. So Doug and I, about three-thirty in the afternoon, started the job of chopping the tree down; whittling it down to the point where we had about six inches of [word inaudible] wood right in the center of it. And I have to tell you, we were very tired at the end of that afternoon, but... We were talking about which way it was going to go. Most of the limbs were on the downhill side, and we figured it might go sidehill, it might go uphill, it could go downhill. [Laughs]. We were very nervous about it. And Doug said, I want you to stand back there, and I'm going to do the last couple licks on this thing, and see if we can get it to go. So I stepped back about thirty feet and I was watching, and I had kind of an escape route planned; a place where I was going to run, if I could run, and hide behind a tree if I had to, and was just hoping and praying that Doug was going to be careful. And he got to the point where the tree made a crack. He had hit it with a blast very hard and made it crack. He looked down on the ground, and about twenty feet where he was standing was the radio. He said, Grab the radio. I said, Oh, it probably won't land there. He goes, Grab it anyway! So I ran back and grabbed the radio, and I heard another crack and that tree landed right where the radio had been. So it's a good thing I got the radio out of there. I had plenty of time. But that sucker came down, and we hand-felled it and looked at it, and there was no fire at all in that tree. But as policy went at the time, and I'm sure does still, anything that's struck by lightning needs to come down. So we chopped down the old heartbreaker Ponderosa pine tree, and then hiked off the hill, and went back to the district. Turned in our firemen's report. And we got a lot of ribbing because of the tree. Everyone on the district knew we had to bring it down; they were all laughing about it.

This is what I did for several years. And then eventually I ended up on the Saint Regis Fire crew, which had originally been a helatack crew. And they still called themselves a helatack crew but they didn't have a damn helicopter the year I worked there in 1981. I made some very good friends who are now life-long friends out of Saint Regis. We were a very interesting mix of people. We started out with thirty-five people on the fire crew that year, went through training, had guard school. They gave me an assistant squad leader position on the crew; we had about thirty-five people initially. By the end of the season it had whittled down to about thirty. Big

crew. We were used all over the region. Extensive area fires that summer; it was a very busy summer for us. We had a damn good crew. In fact at one point we were down in the Salmon River, and our FMO was down on this fire working as a safety officer—Roger Hearst—and Roger was very proud of us. We worked our butts off trying to do a good job. We had an incident where we were digging lines downhill, and there were several of us there who didn't feel very comfortable about it. But below us was the Lolo Hot Shot Crew, digging lines, and in that type of terrain and that type of vegetation the way the soil was, we weren't digging a complete bunk line, we were digging progressive lines, which means we were building very fast, completing our line as we went and then burning out as we went. But the fire had hooked down around below and was starting to come back up the hill at us. So we all kind of looked around and a few of us looked at our squad boss, who was not really all that experienced; he was an engineer but he wanted to get some fire qualifications, and he was running the show on our crew. I remember specifically looking at him and saying, "Don't you think it's time to head up the hill?" but he insisted that we dig down the hill. We eventually had to run to the black and get into the black, and about the time we all got into the black [rest of phrase inaudible]. Needless to say, he didn't go out on any fires after that. Anyway, we basically kicked Lolo Hot Shots down the hill; told them to dig faster or get out of our way, which I don't think they appreciated very much. But we had a very good crew that year. The following year I applied to jump—smokejumper—and I was lucky enough to get accepted into the program. A lot of this came from the help I received from the Saint Regis Ranger District, and the fire people there who were very supportive of my wants and my aspirations to become a smokejumper, and they were a big help to me, allowing me to get into the program. A lot of hiring recommendations from the FMO and the others. So in 1982 I came to Missoula and started my rookie training, went through a month of that. Spent a very interesting eight years as a smokejumper. One season I had to sit out because of a knee injury while I was on Oregon, late fall of 1986 I blew my knee out playing football in fire camp. I was the only smokejumper stupid enough to go out there on the field and play football. Tore the [words inaudible] off my femur, had it repaired, went through a year of rehab, and then came back and jumped in 1988 and '89 with a knee brace. After about two more operations I stopped jumping, at the advice of my doctor, who strongly convinced me that if I continued on doing the job I would eventually ruin my leg. So at his advice I stopped jumping. Very many good years as a smokejumper; Exciting times, traveling from the southwest of New Mexico, Arizona, through California, Alaska, Washington, Oregon, Idaho, all over the place basically. Florida, Georgia, seeing a lot of the country, meeting a lot of really good people. Fighting a lot of fires, just experiencing a lot of travel and a lot of interesting things.

After I stopped jumping I was offered a position to work as a tour guide at the Smokejumpers Visitors' Center, which I did, prior to that also in 1987, when I was rehabbing my leg. I became interested in the information end of the job, and talked to several people, one of which, probably my closest mentor, Dale DuPour, encouraged me to go into fire information. Which I took the intro to fire information [word inaudible] in 1990 in the spring. I'd spent a month out on the Frances Merion National Forest in South Carolina after Hurricane Hugo went through in 1989 I went out there and worked as a public affairs officer. We spent a lot of time talking to schools, encouraging people not to burn their garbage out on their lawn. Because of all the fuel that had accumulated since Hugo had gone through. Wonderful time in South Carolina with all the people that worked down there on the [Witherbee?] Ranger District, and spent some time touring the forest, which isn't very big, it's just two ranger districts. McClellandville and the Witherbee are

both... the whole forest is just two ranger districts, and it's all that big, really. They were doing a lot of helicopter logging at that time, pulling great big pickles; it's amazing how big the trees are down there, with helicopters, and removing some of the fuel loading, but it was still quite tremendous. And I guess the only advantage they had down there at the time was the fact that there was a lot of humidity, and when they did get a fire, usually by the time the fire would start to go, the humidity would come up and basically the fire would die down. It would consume a lot of the fuels, but the humidity would also help things to rot quickly. So as opposed to being up here in Montana, they were in a situation where they had all this fuel; they went from five to ten tons per acre, to about anywhere from seventy-five to a hundred and fifty tons per acre, just because of the hurricane. They had a lot of stuff on the ground, and they had a lot of concern about homes burning, and we actually did see some homes burning from people burning garbage in their yard.

Anyhow, after that I went through fire information training, and eventually through command and staff, and worked intensively with the Smokejumpers Visitors' Center. I eventually became the manager of the Smokejumpers Visitors' Center. Have gone to several fires with Bob Michaels Type One team, as the assistant to the fire information officer on his team. Now retired. Can't think of his name right off the top of my head, but I should know it. Anyway we went to some large fires, very complex fires, and worked with doing that off and on while I still worked in the Visitors' Center. Got involved with multi-agency coordination, several times myself and another colleague of mine, Tim Love, would run the information end of that here at the aerial depot when we had a lot of fire activity; for instance, 1994, a very tragic year for wildlife fire fighters. 1990 I was still rehabbing my leg part of the time because I'd had another surgery. But we had a rash of fires out of Missoula and an air tanker went in down south of Missoula in the Bitterroot. And Mr. DuFour, who was public affairs here in Region One, media guru I guess you would say, asked me to work on the investigative team, as an information officer for the region which I did. Then in '94 another tanker hit Squaw Peak, west northwest of Missoula, where two of the co-pilots perished; and again I was pulled off of MAC and was put right onto the investigative team for that end of it. In 1997 I was doing my job here at the aerial fire depot and I got a phone call from Twentieth Century Fox, and they started picking my brain. They picked my brain, phone calls up to six hours for every day that they were calling me. I was on a phone call for six hours at least a day with these people. I finally asked them to either put me on the payroll or leave me alone to let me do my job. They actually offered me a position, contracting, through the Forest Service to go to work for them advising on a very stupid film called *Firestorm* starring Howie Long. So I worked on that for a while. My main goal is information in the Forest Service and working in a public affairs capacity. To an extent I still love to work in fire. I think I've had an interesting career. I wonder where I'd be right now if I hadn't injured my knee, if I'd still be out there jumping fires. or what I'd be doing. I've enjoyed every minute of it. I hope to continue on for several more years, and hopefully those years will be as enjoyable as the first twenty-five.

Anything else you want me to talk about?

BB: How about rookie training as a jumper.

TE: Rookie training as a jumper?

BB: What was that like?

TE: Rookie training was one of the hardest damn things I ever went through in my life. I guess you never know how good a shape you're in until you find out you're not in very good shape. And I guess I was about in medium shape, mediocre shape I should say. I showed up here, passed the mile-and-a-half run. The P.E. test was not a real problem. Running in my boots, on the other hand, was kind of a problem. I didn't really enjoy running in my boots. I had purchased some [Buffaloes?] that were twelve inch tops, that were very heavy. And I remember being out on the obstacle course, not the obstacle course, well the obstacle course also, but just doing the running for the three mile [word unclear]. I'll tell you, that was one of the things I hated more than anything. Once we got through part of the unit training—the unit training was not that hard for me; I seemed to grasp it fairly easily. All the units, such as the exit power, where you work your body position, your vigor when you leave the airplane; that was not a problem. The let-down units, where you practice, simulate a tree landing let-down. Even though I had a guy by the name of Willis Curdy, a squad leader, screaming in my face, "Taboo! Taboo! You're doing it wrong!" I still grasped it quite readily. It was not a hard thing for me. The landing rolls came naturally. One of my foremen said, "This boy was born to roll." So I never had trouble with rolls. I never got hurt on a jump. I didn't like the obstacle course. That's a couple hundred yards long. You have to run in your boots. Even I didn't trouble with any one of the obstacles, running in my boots was the thing that killed me. I still made it through that. The jumps were very interesting. I remember my first jump. And this was after you've gone through a couple weeks of being drilled into your head not to run with the wind when you jump. You need to be faced into the wind when you land your parachute. Which makes sense now that we're old, beat-up jumpers. I remember they took us up to I think it was twenty-five hundred feet. They said they wanted us to play with the parachute, get a feel for what the parachute would do. We were jumping at the time with the FS12 which is a fairly new canopy to the Forest Service. They'd been jumping with the T10 before that. The T10 was a little bit dog eared; the FS12 was a little faster, more maneuverable chute. Brought you into the ground fairly fast, but I thought it was pretty cool canopy. And they took us up to twenty-five hundred feet, and I remember we had a couple squad leaders, one of them was my squad leader, Bright Eyes Bill Craig. His nickname was Bright Eyes. It was Bright Eyes, and I think it might have been Steve, one of the foremen that were going out of the plane first, a planeload of rookies. They may have had another squad leader in there somewhere, but...What bothered me the first time up there in the airplane was not actually my jump, but watching those two guys leave the airplane and the sound it made, like they're being sucked out of there. I kinda went, Whoa, those guys are no longer in the door there. But anyway, when it was my turn to jump I felt quite calm, and I was the first person in my stick; I had a jump partner behind me. We were jumping out of a Twin Otter. Twenty-five hundred feet; I didn't know any better from fifteen hundred to twenty-five hundred. If anything goes wrong you're pretty much screwed anyway. So I got the slap to go out of the door from the spotter. And I went out the door, opened up, did my four count, looked up, turned and found my jump partner, saw the airplane leaving, circling around again, and turned and looked at the jump spot, which I could see quite clearly. It was a big, bright, orange panel out there. Big 'X'. And standing in front of the big 'X' were a bunch of people in what we call pickle suits. These were Forest Service higher-ups: Mike Bowman, Troy Curt, Larry Eisen, all standing around this big orange 'X'. And I started driving my parachute toward the 'X'. And pretty much everything I had

learned had emptied out of my head, and I was just getting closer and closer, and thinking, this isn't so tough. I can drive my parachute right into this 'X'. Well what they had done to help us out, as compare to the old days when they used to use a bullhorn and yell at the jumper from the ground, they put one-way radio receivers on our harnesses and attached these to our harnesses so we could actually listen to directions from the ground. People could talk into a radio, we could pick this up, and do what we were told. Well this seemed like a really good idea to me, and so while I'm sailing down, I'm about a thousand feet from the ground now, getting closer and closer to this big, orange 'X' on the ground with all the pickle suits around it. And I realized I'm moving pretty fast, and I think this is a good thing because it was going to make me land near the 'X' in front of all these higher-up people, these supervisory people; and pretty soon I started listening, and I could hear on my receiver that the words on my receiver were, "Grey Badger, you need to turn and face into the wind." Well, there was a Grey Badger in my rookie class. And he was actually on my airplane. And as I got closer to the ground, I could tell I was tracking faster along the ground, and [word unclear] was moving quite fast under my feet. About three hundred feet I heard this frantic call on the receiver, "Grey Badger, Grey Badger! You need to steer your parachute into the wind! Turn around, Grey Badger, turn around!" And I thought, well Grey Badger's really screwing up here. I can't believe he's not doing what they're telling him to do. What's wrong with him? Well forty feet off the ground, I heard "Grey Badger! [Get down!]" And I thought, well maybe I'm Grey Badger now. And sure enough I was Grey Badger, or so they thought, I hit the ground going about thirty miles an hour and I bounced, probably about twenty feet through the air, hit the ground again, was drug another thirty feet through the weeds until I popped my connection and the canopy collapsed. I did a great roll, because I was critiqued later saying... The training foreman who critiqued me was Jim [Searson], I hear you did a good roll but you couldn't tell that you did as good roll as fast as you were going. But anyway I hit the ground, I bounced, I got drug, I just pooped my [word unclear], I stood up and I said "Eldridge, okay." And I was, I didn't feel hurt. I just felt I had a little bit of the wind knocked out of me. I bounced, I got up; one of the squad leaders, Steve Cox, came up to me, looked me right in the eye, I had my helmet off, and he was totally pale. And his eyes were about as big around as silver dollars. He was looking in my eyes, I knew he was looking in my eyes to make sure I was okay, if my eyes were dilated. And once I smiled at him, he said, "You stupid son of a bitch! You should be in a wheelchair!" And I said, I'm okay. I'm really okay. So anyway, then the critique came. There was another jumper, another rookie bro of mine that actually ran with the wind. Craig [name unclear] was his name, and they called him the drifter after that, 'cause he ended up hitting the fence, I think. He was a long ways away from where I was. At least I was kind of in front of the panel when I hit the ground. But I said, how come you called me Grey Badger? He said, oh yeah. We screwed up there. So I felt not so bad about the whole thing. I felt I wasn't the only one that made a mistake, even though, you know, I was awfully excited about hitting the panel. I never did hit the panel. I hit probably closer than most people. The next jump I made was a totally [hold?] into the wind jump. I did not run with the wind for once.

Anyway we made about eight practice jumps that year. And like I said, it was an experience I'll probably never forget. It was very, very tough. I felt that at the end of my rookie training, at the end of that month, I was probably in the best shape of my life. I didn't have a lot of fat on me and I was very [words inaudible]. I think that it instilled in me a lot of what I believe in today about what human beings can do if they really want to do it badly. There were times what I just thought, man, I don't know when I'm making through this. You got a lot of people out there who

are pulling for you when you're doing that stuff. Even though you feel they wouldn't mind washing me out of the program, I really believed that they don't want anybody to wash out. They'd love to see everybody make it through. People that do wash out, a lot of them pick that option on their own. They make that decision themselves. But sometimes you need to look at a safety issue and see that a person isn't quite grasping what needs to be grasped and you need to let him go.

BB: We have about two, three minutes left. Are there any lessons that you learned through the Forest Service or through jumping that you will carry with you forever? Any thoughts, philosophies, anyplace you want to go where you [words inaudible].

TE: Well, I guess what I have to do is go back to my early days in the smokechasers and remember a lot of things that I learned at that time. I'd never been, never before worked at a job where safety came first. I mean, a lot of people give lip service to that. I've worked in the oil fields, I've been a logger. I've seen some pretty ugly things happen to people. But the Forest Service has taught me that there's no piece of land, no resource, that's worth anybody losing their life over. I have to give a lot of credit to my way of looking at safety and work issues and the work issues that we deal with, to the people early on in my career. I think they instilled this attitude of, let's go out in the morning, let's work hard, and then let's go home every night. You know, when you're out there, if you're digging fire line, or if you're dropping trees in a clearcut unit or a burn unit, doing brush disposal, you've got to keep your head out of your butt. You've got to look around on a regular basis. You've got to focus on the job, but you've also got to remember that there are other people working around you. And maybe some of these people might not have the attitude you have, and it never hurts to open your mouth if you see or feel something in your gut that isn't right. Communication is an important tool that we need to use on a daily basis in any job. But those of us in the Forest Service do a variety of different things that involve running tools, power tools, that involves natural things happening. Especially on fires, when trees come down, rocks come down. I guess I can't stress enough that without, and I think there are plenty of people out there that share my same attitude toward safety, but without it I don't think our agency would last very long. I think we should be proud of the fact that we've been around so long and we seem to instill this attitude. Because the jobs that we do are not just commonplace; there are risks involved.

BB: Good. I think that covers it.

TE: Okay.

END OF INTERVIEW