

HARNEY COUNTY HISTORY PROJECT

AV-Oral History #329 - Sides A & B

Subject: John Scharff

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This is a tape recording of the John Scharff presentation to employees of the U. S. Forest Service held in Hines, Oregon on March 26, 1986.

CHARLIE CAGLE: ... as Manager. I've known John all my life, and in 1966 when I got my first job with the Forest Service, I told him that I was going to be spending the summer up at Allison Guard Station, and he says, "Oh, I've spent a few nights there." And I thought well how, how would he have spent a night there when he worked for the Refuge out there. And through the years, he's told me some of his past experiences with the Forest Service. And so, here for the last couple of years I thought it would be a good opportunity to have him talk to us about what it was like when he worked for the Forest Service.

John was born and raised in Grant County, and I believe his first appointment was in 1921 and 1922 on the Malheur. He was a fire lookout, a fireman, a range rider. And permanent employment began in November 1923 when he was the District Ranger at Powers on the Siskiyou.

And in 1926, he returned to Prairie City District, where he was later Assistant Forest Supervisor on the Malheur, Fremont, and the Willamette National Forests. While he worked with, for the Forest Service, he worked with fire control, development and operations of the CCC program, wildlife, and range management. And from, I think it was August 1st, 1935, he was Assistant Manager at the Wildlife Refuge, later to become the Refuge Manager. And as of, I think it was May 1970, John had something like 48 years of government service. And he was, he is the

only person in the wildlife department that has had that amount of years in government service.

A couple of his big highlights, I think, is the creation of this book, the "Steens Mountain" book, which he was a co-author with Charles Conkling, and E. R. Jackman, and this is on the Harney Basin and Steens Mountain. When we have a break, if you folks would like to look at this a little bit, you can, and I'm sure if you would like to have one of your own, John can probably arrange that also. There is about 23,500 prints made of this, and I was fortunate enough to get one of the first ones made, and I was lucky enough that I got two of the people to autograph my book.

One of the other ones is, I think it was in the '70's, or late '60's, the British Broadcasting Company from England came over to the United States to do a documentary, and they did a film on the Steens Mountain and Harney Basin, and Catlow Valley. And John then got his movie stardom, and so did my dad. And John, I think everybody, or most everybody always has a godfather, or godparents, this is my godfather. So, it gives me a lot of pleasure to introduce John today.

JOHN SCHARFF: Thank you, thank you. (Applause) Thank you Charlie. That was a rather glowing introduction. And for the things that I have done over the years, that I have been one of those lucky guys that's always had a good job, and always liked what I was doing. That's something more than a lot of people today can say.

I want to go back a ways, about 1906; I think that's about the date the Malheur Forest was created. My father was a sheep man, and was running sheep, three or four bands of sheep on the forest, summered on the forest, and they come out with a little, what they called the use book, red-backed book. I was so much impressed with the front page of the ... was a picture of about forty, fifty head of horses in the corral, a big log corral, like there was so many at one time in Grant County. And they sold Wahlers Mustache, the ranger had a loop shook out, and the caption was Forest Ranger catching his horse for the day's work.

Then when I was sixteen years old and herding sheep up on what is now the Wallowa Whitman, I saw my first Forest Ranger, which really impressed me. He had a big black horse, a black saddle, and white strings, and was a very picturesque sort of fellow, and he was marking the stock driveways. And they had a bright red sign that says this marks the center of stock drive way.

After it weathered awhile, it was just the color of the yellow pine bark, and it was very difficult sometimes to follow. But anyway, he was posting that sign, and I was watching him. And when he got done why I had a little stub of a pencil in my pocket and I got that pencil out and I went up and done like Cy J. Bingham, went up and put my name on it and date, and one thing and another, and I'll never forget what he said. He watched me, and then he said, "Young fellow," he said, "you know self advertisement is damn poor advertisement." And I never did scribe any more of them.

Well then, when I was in school, high school, and grade school too as far as that's concerned, why from the time I was fourteen years old until I was about twenty, why every summer I herded sheep. Because first I liked it, liked to be out there, and there isn't anything as responsive to good treatment as a band of sheep. And I liked that part of it, and I liked the money involved. A sheepherder would get a hundred dollars a month, a ranch hand about fifty dollars a month, and a cowboy seventy-five. So, I could go out and herd sheep for four or five months and eat pretty "steaky". And I couldn't spend any of it, and I really enjoyed that.

When I graduated from high school in '21, why the principal of the school had been a Forest Ranger in his day. And he was, then he taught school and was studying law and became one of the better-known lawyers in Eastern Oregon. But he went to the supervisor and told him that he thought maybe I would be interested in a lookout job, and they were planning the first lookout on Fields Peak that year, so I finally got on. And I really thought, well now I'm on my way.

So, first job I had I repaired telephone lines from John Day out to Magone Lake, and that took several days. That was right after World War I and the Forest Service was getting a lot of equipment. They had tons of this duplex wire, telephone wire, and Malheur got two old trucks, an old Nash Quad 4-wheel drive, and the bed about a foot higher than the normal bed of a truck.

So, when I come back from this telephone line, the supervisor said, "Have you ever driven a truck?" Well, I said, "Well, everything that I've driven in my days had a tongue in it. And these are two, four, six horses a head." "And well," he said, "that's fine," he said, "well we got a carload of wire in Crane, and I'll take you out here and show you how to shift gears, and you can go down and haul that wire." Well, I'd never driven, hardly ever ridden in a vehicle, let alone a truck. He said,

"I'll take you down the road here and show you how to shift gears." So, we got down below John Day about three miles and he says, "Well, I'll turn around now and you can drive it back." So, then he's turning around, it was on a little incline, and he got it in neutral and backed through a yard fence of a ranch there, and took out a couple panels of pickets, and he says, "Geeze, we better get out of here." (Laughter) The way he went. And so, he never said a word to me about driving back, he was anxious to get out of sight.

So, when we got back, he said, "Well, now you know all about it." So, he said, gassed it up and start out in the morning. So, I got the old truck out on some level ground, and finally got so I could kind of shift gears, and started out for Crane. Well that day and age of course the roads aren't anything like they are today, they were mostly one track. So, I was, didn't know anything about eight-hour laws, or eight-hour work days, or anything like that, so I drove that old truck from daylight to dark everyday. There weren't any lights on it, they were carbide lights, but they didn't work.

So, I went down to Crane and got a load of wire, and they were in 165-pound spools. The wire ... and insulators were in barrels, 700-pound barrels. So, I can manage the wire all right, because there was a low place, it had been dumped out of the boxcars just in the sand there, and there was a low place I could back the truck in and I could manage the wire. But these insulators, well that was a different story. But they were the last ones to deliver. I delivered part of that wire over, it was in the Van area, and part of it up to, up on, well the Emigrant Creek, and then hauled the last load into John Day.

But one thing I always remember going to Crane, the first evening I was there, why there was a Chinaman that was great, I guess must have been a grandfather of Mike's, or a great grandfather, Mike's that has the restaurant here, Yee. And I knew a lot of the Chinamen in the John Day country, and so when he found out I did, why he treated me pretty nice, and always had a nice meal for me when I come in there.

But the thing that I was a little, I thought was kind of about half funny was, there were four cowboys come in there and sat down at the table, and when you went in there, why Yee always

brought you a glass of water and a little square cake about two inches square, had a very sticky surface. So, when these cowboys got in there, each one of them pulled a quarter out of their pocket and laid it on the table and sat there, saying nothing, just looking, and pretty soon one said, "I win, and he trapped the first fly." And they sticked on, got sticky cake. When a fly hit it, he stayed there.

So, I got, when I, the last load was the load I took the insulators out. And so, I got some planks and railroad, or railing, and got all fixed to load. And there was a couple, they were shipping lambs there, and the couple shepherders that were left there, and they were both, been on a prolonged drunk. So, they were broke, and I told them I would buy their supper if they would help me load these insulators. So, they agreed to that, and we went down to get the insulators, and when we started one barrel up they did fine, why this, one of the fellows said, "Well, I just can't lift on this until after I eat." And I knew that wouldn't work, so I said, "Well, if you're going to eat, you're going to lift a little bit at the present time."

So, we managed to get the insulators on the truck, but the one thing that kind of bothered me was unloading them. And I had a short crowbar, and one of them was to be unloaded up at, the barrel up at the Emigrant, and they were all split insulators in those days, there were no solid insulators like we have today.

So, I finally pried that barrel off of there, and you can imagine what happened, it slipped and about half of them went into the creek. And there was an old ranger, I don't recall his name, but he didn't work long after that, but he lived in Prairie City for quite a number of years. And he was in charge of that telephone crew, and he was really upset. He reported it to the Supervisor about me dumping the insulators in the creek.

Well then when we got that job done, why that was the first survey party in the timber, was taking place up at the Bear Valley Ranger Station. Fred Matts was in charge of party, and Bruce Hoffman, and I can't remember the other fellow's name that were the cruisers, and they had a team and a buckboard, and so they would work out from there with this team and buckboard. And so, they were short, the compass runner, so then I got the job there for a couple of, almost a month

running compass for Bruce Hoffman. And at that time, we found a township up there that had the nicest records that you could imagine, descriptions of the corners and one thing and another, but there had never been a corner marked in that entire township. They had to get a survey on that before it could be cruised.

J. B. Mc Entire was the Forest Ranger in, on the Bear Valley District, so he took me up to Fields Peak Lookout, there had never been a lookout there before, and had two packhorses with this wire, this duplex wire. And we got up there and hung an old iron telephone on a scrub tree down underneath the peak a ways, and so he says, "Well, this would be a good campsite for you." So, he had a fly for places that didn't have a tent, where they just had a fly up over every pole. And so, he says, "Now down on this east side here about a quarter of a mile is a spring," and he says, "you can get a good ground there, and it's about a mile and a quarter down here to the telephone line on Fields Creek side. And he said, "When you come to a trail be sure and bury it pretty good." And we just laid it out on the ground. So, I had never done any kind of work like that. But anyway, he said, "Well, when you get hooked up, well give me a call."

So, I spent most of the day then shoveling a place level enough for a bed, and put my fly up. And so, then I put the telephone lines out, and in about three or four days why I give him a call. But the season was short that year, I was only up there I think six weeks. They had a little spring where I packed the water from, had two five-gallon water sacks. And I'd go down to that spring, and I always remember I had to, just had a little hole there to dip it from, and it took thirty-three cups to fill a sack. I can remember that number of cups it took. So, then that was the first summer.

The second summer why I was assigned to the Burns District here as a range rider, and county trespass cattle. At that time there weren't any boundary fences to speak of other than maybe an occasional homestead.

So, Bill Hanley here at the Bell A, he had taken about a thousand head of cattle up close to the forest boundary, and he would just turn them loose, and of course they went up hill. And so, I had worked up a trespass case against Bill Hanley.

And then I had the good fortune to ride with the agency buckaroo wagon over in the

Malheur for about two months, which I thoroughly enjoyed.

I'll always remember Bill, that fall I was here on the street waiting for a ride to John Day, and Bill got out of his car and went by me, and pretty soon he turned around and come back and saddled up and said, "I say son, were you the boy that counted my cattle up there on the forest this year?" And I said, "Yes, I am Mr. Hanley," expecting to get the works. And he kind of chuckled and he says, "I say that's some of the cheapest feed I ever bought." (Laughter)

So, then that was in '22, and I took the ranger's examination and passed with a grade of 70.3. And so, then I was a range rider again on the, in fact I got an appointment as a ranger at large, as a range rider on the Malheur Forest. And I spent most of my time up in Emigrant Creek and up in that. They were having some problems there with some folks from over on the other side of the mountain coming over and branding a few of the calves. So, I worked more or less with the local association here, kind of watching that project there.

So, then I got that job, off of that job, and had the opportunity to go the Siskiyou at Agness. And so, the supervisor, E. H. McDaniel's, called and said if you have a couple of saddle horses you better bring them with you, because they're a premium in this country. So, I had a couple of good horses, and I got them all shod up and started out for Agness Ranger District. And that's when I stayed all night with Cy Bingham, or not Cy Bingham, but Cy Donnelly over at Allison Ranger Station in the fall of '23. I rode across, kind of an uneventful trip with the exception of, well I averaged about forty miles a day, and I miscued going across between Paisley and Bly, and spent one night camped out there. And so, the place, the one thing that happened on that trip was a little embarrassing. When I was going down through Ashland, why I had a little pacing horse, one of them was, you know, and like all pacing horses occasionally he would fall down. So, there was, oh must have been fifty, sixty young ladies there admiring this little horse, he was a beautiful little horse. And he saw everything way over here, but nothing close by. And right out in front of, about, this bunch of girls that was admiring this little horse, why he just fell as flat as he could be right on the pavement there. (Laughter) Much to my embarrassment. I thought I got off pretty gracefully but I finally run backwards and sat down. I got organized and went on, but I really got the big hand

there.

Well then, I got down to the supervisor's office, E. H. McDaniel's, and he --- I got into his office the next morning and he said, I got my instructions in three sentences. He said, "Now John," he said, "you are the district ranger of the Agness Ranger District." And pretty soon he said, "You are now the servant of the public and conduct yourself accordingly." I figured that meant I shouldn't go down to the country-dance and get drunk on Saturday night. And then pretty soon he said, "I'll see you sometime this winter."

Well I think at that time every forest had a clerk that was really running the forest. And Fannie Abrams was the greatest gal I think I ever knew, and she was the clerk of the Siskiyou Forest, and was more help to the rangers than, by far than the supervisor was. And if it hadn't have been for Fannie I don't think that I would have made it, really. Because I had no idea of what the Forest Service done.

But anyway, she got me headed down the Rogue River and stayed all night at Galice Ranger Station with a ranger name of DeWitt. And then Fannie put me right a few days after that, because in this country why we never thought of paying for a meal, any ranch that we stayed at, or any ranger district, we just --- everybody was free wheeling as far as charging was concerned. So, I just thanked DeWitt the next morning. And then I found out it was customary in that country to pay your way. So, I finally got woke up to that fact, and I found out that was very much the rules and regulations when you got on that side of the mountains.

But first job I got, had to do when we got to Agness, the station there was thirty miles to the nearest wagon road, and that was a long, good many years before the coast highway was built. And that ferry crossed over the river along the coast. And so, I wintered there, largely spending my time re-rolling this duplex wire. They had a lot of it there, and they'd had a lot of fires and they just picked it up by hand and shoved it in sacks, and it was really a mess. But then in just, sharpening tools and taking care of this wire, that was the principal thing that I done that winter.

Along towards spring, I went at the Illinois and we built some telephone lines, several of the rangers got together and built some telephone lines. And so, at that time well Mel Lewis, who was

an old-time ranger, had been promoted, he was on the Page Creek District, where the Oregon Caves is. And Mel was promoted to assistant supervisor, so then they pulled me out of Agness, fortunately, and sent me over to take Mel's place for that summer. And so that was the, quite a summer for fires. That summer we went to our first fire on the 26th day of March, and we got in just in time to shave and clean up and go to the Armistice Dance in November. And there wasn't a time that we weren't on a fire, or going to, coming from, or ... meals, getting ready for a fire. We didn't have a single day off that summer, during that period.

I had a fire over on the, that craggy country on the Chetco, in the tall stand, in ... over there, and had about fifty loggers in there with me. And one of the things that come to light there was that he, one day the cook said to me, he said, "You know somebody is stealing our grub." And I said, "Well nobody is going ---" That was kind of a common practice in that country alright, that they, if they were out anyways where they could get to it why they would bury a few cans of something, whenever they could, some of the natives there.

And there were a lot of breed Indians, and one half-blood Negro family down in that canyon, and it was mostly mining, and poaching was a way of life. And so, this, I told the cook, I said, "Nobody would steal any grub out here ... have to come in and get it." And well he said, "It is, they lost a half a case of pears and three or four pounds of butter last night."

Well I heard a couple of the loggers telling about seeing a man in that area, and so come to find out this was an old country gentleman and he'd gone back in there in World War I, and he'd never been out. He hadn't seen enough people to find out whether the war was over, and that's the first question that he asked one of the fellows on the fire line whether the war was over yet.

Then he came out later on. I went down to visit his cabin, a couple of us, and it was just half a roof was all that was left on that cabin, and he had quite a lot of bedding apparently, but it had worn out more or less and he had tanned, kind of semi-tanned deer hides for a bed. He just lived on the fat of the land. So that's where the grub was going, he was slipping in there at night, and the first time probably he'd had a good feed in quite awhile. Well, he came out then in civilization, and several years later after I had left there, his name was Hugo Meyer, and he had it in

for a trail phone. And so, he dug a big square hole, this trail phone had always rode a mule. And he dug this big hole and gotten two or three cords of wood up, all fixed, and he had got, someway or other enticed this foreman over there, and shot him, killed him, and then shot the mule, but the mule got away. He didn't kill the mule. So, then he abandoned his project, right there with this dead foreman, and went back to his haunts on the Chetco, and that's where they picked him up, back where he was when he hid out during World War I. He was brought out and tried and declared to be insane. I don't know, they put him away someplace and that's the last I ever heard of Hugo.

I had an interesting experience in, then in the fall of '23, '24, why then I was transferred to the Powers Ranger District, and we built a new headquarters, and they built a barn with an office that winter. And it, the location was on an old city dump, that they bought three or four acres there. And it took us a long time to clean that up to make it, even find a place to build anything. It was just tons of old machinery, and old tin cans, and what have you. But one of the things we did that fall that was of interest, we whipsawed Port Orford cedar lumber to build a lookout house on Iron Mountain. And I had a breed Indian that worked for me; I think he was the stoutest man I ever saw. He was almost as wide as he was tall. But he really knew how to do things. And Hank, Hank and I, Hank just about killed me whipsawing that lumber. And has anybody here ever done any whipsawing? You got an idea of what it's like.

And then the next summer we pulled that lumber up onto this lookout there, and it wasn't too much of a fire season. I spent most of my summer up there, hand planing that lumber, and had a carpenter working there as lookout. And we built that lookout house there on the mountain that summer. That was the summer of '24.

And then '25 was rather an uneventful year; we didn't have too many fires, and had a little timber sale running on the Coquille there.

And the spring of '26, I'd been outside during Christmas, and when I was going back I picked up a paper and I noted where a forest ranger was being transferred. And so, when I read it, well I found out I was being transferred to the Prairie City Ranger District on the Malheur.

(Laughter)

Well, I went home and packed up, and expecting every day to get the word, and nothing happened. And one day the forest supervisor, his name was Adam Wright, and of all the supervisors I worked for, Adam could write the finest letter of any supervisor, or anyone that I have ever known. And --- but he was, well as an example he came over on the inspection for the ranger district, and so I guess I cleaned things all up and got ready for him, you know, and he didn't show, and didn't show, didn't show. About the fourth day why he showed up one morning and he looked like the last rose of summer, and he'd been across the railroad tracks on a ... drunk, and he hadn't shaved, and he was anything but --- of course that was the ... supervisor. But I think that's the best praising I ever got. He never looked at a thing, but it was, he really, really could write it up. But he got injured in some sort of a car wreck shortly after that and retired.

So, then I transferred, it was kind of interesting, he came all the way over to Powers to tell me that I was transferred to Prairie City Ranger District, and he said, "Now, how long will it take you, John, to get ready to go?" And I said, "Well, I could catch the bus out of here this afternoon." And so, then I finally told him that I had read this in the paper and I was all packed up ready to go. Well he said, "You're going to have to stay here, kind of go over things with the new ranger, and check the property." So, there was a boy, Loren Campbell, I guess it was, that came in and took over that. I sold him my saddle horses and took a note for six percent interest and headed for Prairie City Ranger District.

Down there at Agness the, I run onto a fellow that was a most unusual, the fellow's name was, we called him Bear Grease Bill. He would come by and stay all night with me, and he was somewhat greasy all right. But he just trapped cougar for the bounty, thirty-five dollars a bounty. And he'd catch a cougar about once a month, and his wants weren't very great. But one evening we were visiting, and I finally said, "Bill, where are you from, anyway?" And he said, "Well really, I'm from Chicago." He said, "I had a law practice there, and one day," he said, "I just said well there must be a better way of life than this, so just decided I'd, I'd just turn the key in the lock and never went back."

And so, there was a school teacher that came in there from Portland, a girl, that --- Rockford Spring, the little breed Indian kids why when the weather got good why they just failed to go to school. So along in February they always had, always had early spring weather down in there, that time of year. Along in February she just didn't have any kids. So, the directors told her well you just as well go on home, because we aren't going to pay you anymore because none of the kids are going to school. And she maintained she had a contract. So, when Bill heard about it, why he advised her then, go to school, ring the bell, recess and at noon, and stay there during the day until four-thirty and go home. So after about a couple of weeks of that well the school board could see they were kind of in bad, so they started eviction proceedings. So, Bill, they had a trial, had at Gold Beach, and old Bill cleaned up and bought himself a \$9.60 blue suit with a beautiful pin stripe in it, and went down and got admitted to the bar and defended this girl, and they had to pay her contract.

And came back to that hotel there and hung this suit up in the closet, and several years after that I saw Larry Lucas who was running the hotel, almost ten years after that, and I asked him, I said, "Whatever happened to Bill?" And he said, "Don't have any idea." He said, "He disappeared just like he come." But he says, "His blue suit is still hanging up in the closet there in the hotel."
(Laughter)

Well it was great to get back to Eastern Oregon, and where they had different people and different conditions and everything. And the Prairie City District was a real fine district. At that time, I don't know how it lays now, but at that time it came out to the road, to the highway, down to the road to Van, and then over including below Malheur and all that. Very few roads. And there was, mostly a horseback job, and it was just what I like.

We had 59,960 sheep on the permit on that district, and about 4,800 head of cattle. And there weren't any boundary fences to speak of. I had a real interesting trespass case with the United States Senator Bob Stanfield, who was supposedly running 50,000 sheep in Eastern Oregon. And he had a permit on the Prairie City District for 6,000 head on the Little Malheur and that North Fork country. And so, Bill, or Bob got to having financial troubles and he was grasping at all straws. So, he rented his 2,000 head of his permit to a little Basque sheep man. And so, he had a contract that

he'd bought the sheep for so much money, and then he was to turn them back at whatever the going price was in the fall. Well the price of sheep went up, so Bob was in the process of selling this little Basco's sheep and making a couple dollars a head. And this little fellow was just about to go nuts.

Well I'd been over in the Little Malheur country marking boundaries for a few days, and hadn't shaved or cleaned up at all, and so I was coming out of there when I run onto this little fellow. He thought I was the range rider down at Flag Prairie, and so he just unburdened himself. And so, we rang the bell to Washington, D. C. on that. We were supported all the way up with no problems at all, and reduced his permit from 6,000 to 2,400 head. And then the next year why I got him for the 2,400. So, it can be done, you know, it cleaned a United States Senator out of a 6,000 permit in two years. I doubt very much today if you could do that.

Well they --- it was one of the nicest districts, and I know Florence and I were married when we was on that district, and we was just there one year after we were married. I'd go out on the range inspection trip, and I'd pack the horse in the morning and tell her where I'd meet her in the evening, and she'd lead the pack horse and go to where we were meeting. And we always tried to camp in a nice spot where we could catch a fish, and it was really a glorious summer. Had a good crew of short-term fellows, and it was a lot of fun and a lot of enjoyment.

Well then out of the clear sky, I was promoted to assistant supervisor in charge of fire control on the Malheur. And I, it was a good experience, but I didn't like the fire control business too much, and so the next year then I was detailed, or was transferred to the Fremont, and in charge of grazing and wildlife management. Didn't spend much time at that because that was about the time that the CC program come aboard, and we --- I later went down to the Siuslaw for thirty days to help get organized down there. They had five camps, and I stayed there a year before I got back.

But they --- let's see, it was the summer of, it would have been the summer of '33, and it was a bad fire year. And so, I was out on the forest when the supervisor finally got a hold of me and asked me when I was coming in. And I said, "Well I plan on, probably be Saturday night before I get in." Well he said, "I think you better come in today." He said that things had shaped up here a little different.

So, when I got in there, why I walked in the office about one o'clock, and he said, "There was a truck on its way up here to get twelve pack mules and two saddle horses." And so, he says, "You better get out here and get to buying these mules and getting ready." "Well gosh," I said, "Jack, you couldn't buy twelve pack mules in Lake County." I said, "All the broke mules are in use." And well he said, "You aren't going to buy the mules in here." And so, I took that as a dismissal, and went on out.

And I'd remembered there was a chiropractor in Burns, or at Lakeview that was the administrator of an estate over in the west side, and I had been told that they farmed with mules. So, I went down and looked him up, and he said, "Yes, we've got about thirty-five head of the finest mules in the country." So, I said, "Well let's go look at them, if they're for sale." And he said, "Well, they are all for sale." So, we went out, and by gosh that was the scrawniest looking little mules I ever saw. They'd been worked with ill-fitting collars, and a lot of them were ... But I was getting desperate, so I said, "How much do you want for the mules?" He said, "Fifty dollars." I said, "Oh that's highway robbery for these mules." I finally bought them for thirty-five dollars and bought the twelve mules, and picked the twelve mules. They had a squeeze gate there, and brought them in there, and roached their manes, and sheared their tails up, and kind of make them look like mules as much as we could. And so, they, then he---

SIDE B

JOHN: --- had two good saddle horses there, and bought those for, I think, sixty dollars apiece. So, we just got the mules shaped up when the truck come, and I loaded the mules and saddle horses. And I'll never forget what I said when they disappeared, I said to this fellow I said, "I hope I'll never see those mules again."

So about three days after that why I was sent down to the Siskiyou on some big fires. And they had a fire that was on the Klamath. They had two crews on it already, one on each side, and the lead of the fire was --- When I got down there why it was getting dark, and there was just about a hundred and fifty men that came in off of another fire, and mostly loggers. So, the supervisor told

me to, Glen Mitchell who was another great guy, told me to get down there and pick out twenty of these men, and we'd have to cut trails three or four days in order to get in to where we could establish the camp. There was an old trail there, but it had grown up. So, I picked them mostly for shoe leather, and loaded them on a truck and we got down to ... for breakfast, and got a big lunch apiece, and started cutting trails. And each one of us had a blanket to spend the night.

We cut trail there two days and they had an old gyro there that would come in there everyday and drop off some grub to us. So, when we got in there to get the camp established, why they got the ... to go down to the ... and there would be some pack mules there for us. So, when it got daylight, and this crew had a, there was a fellow by the name of Thornton who had packed for me when I was over to the Siskiyou there before, real good packer. The only thing was, he wasn't too dependable at times especially if he got around where some of those fellows were making home brew.

And so, I took Thornton and went down there, and wouldn't you know there my mules were. And they had pack outfits for big mules, and by gosh it was dark by the time we got those mules packed up and started up the trail. And fortunately, it was a moonlight night and so we got up to where the camp was and where we had brought in some more men, and we were short one mule. So, they had 150 pounds of bacon on him.

So, the next morning I sent a couple fellows back there, and I told him, I said, "I don't care for the mule, but bring the bacon." And so, they come back with the bacon, the pack outfit, and I never did ask him what happened to the mule. He didn't shove it off over the hill someplace, and he probably just cut his throat and left him.

I was supposed to be there for about a week, we got things organized and going, and I was there forty days. It was one of those fires when, well there was no way to put it out. It was in those craggies there, and ... and stuff on the ground, and just the case they kind of, when it broke out, why stop it. And it was just a case of waiting for rain.

There was, in this group that I picked, the original group there, there was a typical bull, the kind of fellows that went down and they --- in the south and worked on the levees in the wintertime,

and come north in the summertime and worked in the lumber camps and around. And I always remember he had a, he packed a little weeny can in his pocket, and when he'd come to a place for a drink, why he'd take that out and get a drink and shake the water out and put it back in his pocket. And he had a little pack with him. So, but he was a real fine worker, he just was, he could cut more brush than any two men ordinarily would.

Well we, when I got ready to leave there at the end of this forty days why I was kind of --- well what happened was that deer season come on, so I just sent word to the supervisor I was leaving, and turned it over to a young chap there that had worked there, was a real good hand. So, I was kind of going around telling these fellows good-bye, we'd worked together there so long, and it was such a nice bunch of fellows, they were mostly loggers.

And so, this fellow showed me his credentials, and he was a Canadian Mountie. And he'd, he said that there was a fellow that had come up north and hooked up with a couple of other fellows that went out on a trapping expedition, and this fellow came in, in the spring and cashed in his furs, and said that these other boys would be in, in a day or two. But they didn't come, and didn't come, so they went out and looked. And he had shot both of these fellows and appropriated the furs. And so, this boy was detailed down here to look him up. And he was a fellow that followed the logging business, he was a logger, so he'd go to a logging camp and --- until he looked the people over, and then he played the part of a mole, he'd draw his money and leave, and maybe get a job in a sawmill until he could look him over. So, then there was so many loggers on these fires that he just come out on the fire.

And so, I asked him how long he would be there, and he said he would be there until such time he was either called off or he found his man. And he'd been down here something over a year then. So, I have often wondered what happened to him. He did tell me before I left, if some night if there is a mole that knocks at your back door and wants a handout, well he said look twice before you turn him loose. He said, "I may go over in that Lakeview country and look around." He never did show, I know he would have looked me up if he would have been there.

MAN: We were wondering what happened to the Canadian Mounted.

JOHN: Well that largely is the story of my life. But the conception that there is a few little funny incidents that I have --- kind of like to reminisce about.

When I was on the Agness Ranger District there was a neighboring ranger by the name of Vail, and he had ruptured himself from a fire, and was waiting around for word to go to the hospital to get repaired. And so, he stayed with me there at Agness, at the ranger district, and so on Sunday we would always go down to the hotel for Sunday dinner.

And so, this schoolteacher that I had mentioned before, why she was there, and Vail had his saddle horses on that side of the river, and I had mine on the other side. At that time there was no bridge there, you had to catch the river just right to swim the pack stock across. And so, he asked this girl if she would like to go for a horseback ride. And she'd never ridden a horse, so she thought that was great. She said, "Just wait until I get ready here." So, she changed her clothes.

In the meantime, Vail told me, he said, "Gosh John," says, "you're going to have to go with us, it just kills me to ride a horse with the ---" So I didn't think too much of the idea, but the pack train there, with the mail train of a string of mules, they went up the river Monday and came back Tuesday, and then up Wednesday and back Thursday, and then up and back. So, this was Sunday, and I was sure that there wouldn't be any mule trains on that road, on that trail.

So, we got the girl mounted, and he had a gentle old mare but she was plum crazy at times. So, she was riding this mare, and going along, and by gosh I didn't know that they had made a special trip up to a mine there that morning and were coming back. And this old mare could just see those packs wobbling along on those bluffs there, but she couldn't see the horses, or the mules. And when she saw those, why she turned around at one of those bluffs and came right back by me where there wasn't room to pass. And I grabbed the bridle reins and snubbed her up and backed up about ten feet, and there was plenty of room there for this girl to get off. And so, she just sat there and laughed, and I kept telling her, I said, "Get off on the upper side there." And I was just going to turn the old mare loose, and let her go to the river. But she just sat there, and pretty soon this old mare exploded. I don't know what position she was in, but she struck me right over the eye there with one foot, and stuck the other foot, the other front foot in my hip pocket. (Laughter)

So, it just knocked me out cold, and so when I come to, there was a mule standing there, kind of looking me over about four or five feet away. And so, then it occurred to me, where is this girl. And so, I jumped up and I remembered seeing her just make a big loop, just like a diving beauty, and she went down about forty feet. And there was a log lying there that fortunately had a lot of accumulation there of needles and little twigs, and one thing and another. And she landed parallel with that log, and was lying there just laughing. She thought that was --- never hurt her at all. If she had landed five feet closer she would have been on raw rock, and if she had been five feet further she'd have been in the river.

So, I scooted down there to help her out. And I got up there to kind of, pulled, and tugged, and pushed, and one thing and another, and got her up on the trail. So, she just thought that was a lark, you know. She had a hole in one stocking about the size of a quarter, and that was the only damage done.

When I got up there why here my handkerchief was hanging on the oak bush there, and I went up and got her. Hell, I didn't have any pants. And she just, walking down --- I was just, bare, bare ground. By that time this eye was swelled shut, and my other one was swelled up pretty good.

And so, we started down the trail and I was holding my pants up, and traveling behind. It was a nice day, you know, and I think we met every native in that country. (Laughter) Well I got down then to where, got down to where, at the old barn there and got a few shingle nails and got my pants patched up. By that time, I had to hold this eye open to see.

So, we got back up to the ranger station and spent, Vail spent all night packing hot clothes for my face, and the next day I could see a little bit out of my right eye. But I was just about as black as that coffee.

But later that evening, why then the people got to telling this girl there at the hotel how dangerous it was, that she had a complete breakdown. And they sat up with her I think most of the night.

Another little experience we had, Mel Lewis, who was the assistant supervisor, or supervisor at that time, and was on the ranger district there at Page Creek. And so he was a stickler for fire, not only

fire prevention, for prosecution of the --- So I had a little fire show up on the ridge out from, on the Illinois River there, on a trail that went over into the Chetco, and it was just on a rocky ridge where there was a few white bark pine.

So, we went to this fire, and a little fellow by the name of McAllister and I, and put it out and come back. So, we met Mel at the little town of Selma. So, he said, "Do you know how that fire started?" And so, I wasn't too smart, and I said, "Well there was three fellows went over there to, apparently doing some prospecting, and they evidently stopped there, and were smoking and started this fire." Well he said, "Why don't you go get them?" And so that was an order to go get them.

So, Mac and I we got a blanket a piece, and a little grub and our packs, and he swore at me most of the time going over there. "Said if you'd given me a little chance to talk to Mel," he said, "I could have straightened that out." He said, "It probably wouldn't have been entirely truthful, but anyway we wouldn't have had to make this trip."

So, it was just getting good and dusk, and we left the main trail and there was a little trail zigzagged down about a hundred and fifty, two hundred yards into a spring where we could stay all night. So, when we got down there a little ways then we could see this campfire, and these three fellows were there, and they were butchering a deer. So, we get in the ... pretty loud, and this young fellow, one young fellow was a real husky guy, and he picked this little old black tail deer up and just threw it out in the oak brush. So, when we got down there, why we had quite a little visit with them, and we cooked a bite to eat, and then we sat around this fire. So, well this older man was smoking a pipe, and he said, "How has the fire season been?" And so, Mac said, "Well that's what we're over here for." He said, "When you fellows came up, over the hill out of the Illinois there, and stopped there to use your packs," why he said, "you must have been smoking and started a fire." So, the older fellow said, "Well that's what we done, but I didn't think I started a fire." But he said, "I must have, if I'd have been the only one there." Well the younger fellow said, "How do you know?" Before Mac could say anything, I said, "Well we got a lookout on Pearsoil Peak there, and he had his glasses on you boys when you come out of there." Well they said, "Okay they'd come

out to Selma and plead guilty to the fire."

Well, when we went back by there, why hell Pearsoil Peak couldn't see that place at all, or they couldn't see Pearsoil Peak. So, when they got out, well they were upset about that pretty much.

And so, we just happened into Selma with these fellows the next day when Mel Lewis drove in. And Mel was a real hot-headed sort of a chap. And so, they decided then to heck with pleading guilty to a fire. They, after, what they'd done, and I told them, and so Mel and one of these younger fellows got into a whale of an argument. So pretty soon I saw Mac, and he had the other younger fellow out to one side, and told this boy to go back, and he said, "Well, I'll plead guilty to the fires that we started alright." And so, he got fined ten dollars by the justice. And so that night there, the three of us went up to Lake Creek to stay all night. And Mac and I were out sleeping in the bunkhouse, so I said, "What did you tell that fellow to convince him?" Well he said, "I told him if he didn't plead guilty to that fire, we would cinch him for that deer he threw in the brush."

(Laughter) And, well they, there were several little incidents like that that I hark back to.

Well anyway, I was over to, when I was with the Fremont there, along there about the first of June, why, or the first of July, a fellow came along and said, asked to see me and he was from Washington, D. C. And so, he asked me if I'd be interested in, he'd bought this "P" Ranch in this country, interested in coming over and helping him develop that. So, he said, "Now there is a fellow there that's got the job of superintendent but he's never there," and he's says, "he's going to be moved. So as soon as we move him, why then if you'd like to come."

So, Florence and I we talked it over for quite awhile, and it, I hated like the deuce to leave the Forest Service, but all I could see ahead of me was more and more in the office, and especially when we got the CC's, why you could see what was taking over. And I liked the outdoors, so we transferred over there then the 1st of August 1935.

But when the CC program broke, why Jack Campbell the forest supervisor, told me and I said, "You know, these army officers," he said, "they're a different class of people." He said, "They're all high-class people." And he said, "You kind of have to treat them a little differently." And so, he said, "If you don't mind," he said, "I'll kind of run, take care of the CC Camps, and you

can sort of run the forest." So, I said, "Well that's fine and dandy with me."

And so, a few days after that why the advance cadre with the Silver Lake Camp was coming into LaPine on train, so Jack and I went up, and we put on our uniforms and our best tie, and went up to meet this colonel, or this major. And so, when we got up there, why it was a bunch of kids from the Midwest, and farm boys mostly, and they were busy loading up the trucks there, and getting ready to go, and one thing and another.

So finally, Jack asked one of the boys, he said, "Where is the major?" And so, he said, one of the boys looked at the other one, and said, "Well, where is the major anyway?" And this other boy said, "Well, the last time I saw him he was in that third boxcar back there." So, we went back, there the major was, and he hadn't shaved and cleaned up since he left back east, and he had several empty jugs, and he was a sorry looking sight.

So, but the thing that tickled me most of all was that Jack, he said, "Now when we pick this major up," why he said that --- Jack had a new Pontiac. And he said that, "You can drive, and I'll sit in the back seat with the major." (Laughter) So on the way home, why I'd say, "Well major what do you think?" And Jack was getting madder by the minute, you know. And finally, I got told in no uncertain terms to lay off of that.

But we had to, they were all old regular army personnel, and nine out of ten were your prison people. So, when I was detailed then to the Siuslaw to help set up the program down there, why we had our problems. And finally, through the, some of the senators, and one thing and another, well we got the reserve officers. And most of those were college kids, you know, that had taken military in colleges, and were --- hadn't gotten the old army perspective of just sitting around drinking. And so, it really was a fine program. In fact, I think it was the finest youth program that was ever devised, was the CC program. And I've often thought that it might be something to do today, but I don't think that boys, the youngsters of that age would go for it.

But the fact that, what made it so successful was, it was the discipline that they had. And they --- is that they joined the army and then they received a discharge, honorable or otherwise, and that when they quit they had a record there.

Charlie's father came to us from Arkansas, and he too, he told me a number of times, said, "When I crossed Wright's Points it was like, if I hadn't have been signed up, and could have gotten off there," he said, "I'd have started to walking back to Arkansas. " (Laughter) Then he stayed here long enough to marry a local girl, and raised a nice family, and worked for us for, how many years, Charlie, twenty-five?

CHARLIE: Twenty-eight.

JOHN: Twenty-eight years. So, it --- there is one other thing I want to say. These old-time rangers, and I followed the ranger; he was the original ranger, Dick Helm on this, on the district there at Agness, on the Agness Ranger District. And you couldn't help but marvel at the amount of work that those folks got done. Those early day rangers, and the trails and bridges and the buildings and so forth, and about all they had to work with was their hands. And the same way with Cy Donnelly, when he was on this district up here, the telephone lines that were put together, and the trails and the boundaries marked, and it --- and they knew. I knew for instance after the first fall storm when we dispensed with the firemen in the lookouts, I knew just exactly who was going to tack up the sign, or clean out a trail, or what there was to do. I knew exactly who was going to do it, because I was the only one on the district. (Laughter)

Here on the Malheur Forest, there was the supervisor, the assistant supervisor, and two clerks. One of them an administrative assistant and a clerk, and five rangers. That made up the --- and every fall we would get together and have a project. Build a telephone line, mostly telephone lines, and that was something we all looked forward to. We usually scrounged out enough money to hire a cook, and maybe a truck driver, and a couple of fellows, and then we would build telephone lines, and play poker in the evening, and just have a great time.

We would probably get in every fall about three weeks, and that was real nice. And I had the pleasure of being on the first cruising crew for a short time. And then later coming back and marking timber for the, up on camp one, and for sale, with the Hines Lumber Company.

And these, they brought in a lot of tie hackers, that were cutting ties for the railroad. And I noticed as I looked at some old ties the other day, and they were hacked ties, had been there ever

since that railroad was built of those.

And I figured I lived in a good time, and I was like my grandfather, he said that he, they couldn't be in transportation any period in a man's life that could be more progress than during his time from oxen to airplanes. He lived long enough to see planes flown in World War I. And, but he made two trips across the plains, once with oxen and once with a mule team. And I don't remember what time that he came into Grant County, but it was 1874 that he set up the first ... mill on Dixie Creek, and the mines there, so he got here pretty early. And my father was an old country Frenchman that had planted in Canyon City when he was eighteen years old, the fall of 1878. So now are there any questions?

MAN: Yeah John, did the rangers like, when they had the Allison Station, the one up there, did you all pull in, in the wintertime, down in that town, or did you stay up there all winter?

JOHN: Which was that?

MAN: Like the Allison Station, the ranger station?

JOHN: Yeah, they usually moved into, like I moved into Prairie City in the Bear Valley District --- the Bear Valley District was a year around district. And the Burns District up here for a while was a year around district, but then later they'd move into Burns here. But the Long Creek District, they would move into Long Creek.

MAN: What about Allison, John?

JOHN: Huh?

MAN: What about the Allison?

JOHN: Allison, well Cy always went to Prineville. Because that wouldn't have been much of a place to winter in that cabin there. I don't know how they stayed there so long. And he had a bunk in there, and a cook stove, and that was about the size of the furniture, and a couple of benches. I heard him describe to a sheep man, the boundaries of his allotment. And I always remember he went up this one ridge, and there was a big dead snake there, and he described this snake. And he said, "Right there is where you turn to the right and go across the creek, right there." He knew that district so well, that he could describe where you were, and where you should go by the trees. And

those old-time rangers were that way; they really knew their districts.

MAN: John, what was the main transportation route between here and John Day? Was it the new track, 395, or was it the old military road? I know the military road went through Harney and up that way, was that the main way to get to Burns, or did you go ---

JOHN: Well, this road took off here and went up, what did they call that ridge, and came into the south end of Silvies. And then it just kind of went, followed these old roads, just went from ranch to ranch.

MAN: It still came down through the Silvies Valley though, or was the road ---

JOHN: Yeah, it went through Silvies, yeah it went through Silvies. And up at the upper end there of Silvies, where that barn is, that's the old Jack Craddock place; well it went over the hill there into ---

MAN: Silvies Valley?

JOHN: No, that other little valley there.

MAN: Antelope Valley?

JOHN: Yeah, Antelope, and then it turned to the left there and come in there at that hot spring at the Soda Flat. And ---

WOMAN: Tell us a little bit about the Drewsey District that became extinct in the, must have been early '50's.

JOHN: Which was that?

WOMAN: The Drewsey District.

JOHN: It, the Drewsey District, it was kind of thrown in there with the Burns District and the Prairie City District, and that was kind of prior to my time. It was, the Drewsey District didn't exist at that time. But there was at one time, a Drewsey District all right. And ---

MAN: Where did you say that the ranger station was located there at Prairie City, is it very close to where it exists today?

JOHN: No, we had a contract with the carpenter there, and we had a, he built an office there that was about 12 x 20 I think. And it was down on the flat there, you take the road that goes by the old

hospital and go down there about four blocks and it was right in that area. And that was the first time that they had a --- that was the fall of, that would have been the fall of, well '27. The first year I was there I wintered at John Day.

WOMAN: John, was the Sumpter Valley Railroad running when you lived in Prairie City?

JOHN: Pardon?

WOMAN: Was the Sumpter Valley Railroad running when you were there?

JOHN: Oh yes, yeah. In fact, that, I had a ride on that coming back from school one time, at Christmas time, and the snow was, well they was throwing it out, you know, you couldn't see anything out the windows other than a snow bank up through there. So, when they, there was four of us, and when they come around to take up the tickets, I couldn't find my tickets. They were just little cards about an inch wide, and probably two and a half inches long. And by golly I couldn't find my card, my ticket. And so, these other boys of course they knew I had a ticket, so they kind of come to my rescue. And of course, I didn't, I was plumb broke, and fortunately had a fellow in Baker that I knew that bought my breakfast for me. So, there was no way to buy a ticket from this conductor. And so, one of the boys would go up and talk to the conductor a little bit. Come back, well I'm sorry; he's going to dump you off at the next stop. (Laughter)

So, by the time we got to Prairie City why this conductor said, "Well when you find that ticket," he said, "I'd like to have it." So, I got my suit of clothes out to go to a dance, and I thought I had better press it up, and I found the ticket down the tail end of my vest. (Laughter) I had a hole in my pocket. So, I sent him the ticket. (Laughter) Prove to him I was an honest man. Well, that was quite a shipping point for a lot of cattle at that time, there at Prairie City. Of course, those little narrow-gauge roads, those little cars didn't hold too many. But I think it took about three of those cars to make a car on the main line. That was quite a road coming down Dixie, they had switchback that, the only railroad I guess in Oregon that had a switchback. They'd run out of, forward, and then throw the switch and back down once, and then go forward again on down into the valley.

WOMAN: You said your dad ran sheep, and I heard that they had some range wars between the

cattlemen and sheep men.

JOHN: Oh yeah. You know, there was a Crook County Sheep Shooters Association, and they had a corresponding secretary with the Oregonian, and keeping him alerted as to what their plans were, and what they were doing. They never did pin it on anyone, it was --- but they had definite lines drawn between sheep and cattle, and there was quite a lot of bloodshed over that. But that's one thing that the forest straightened out. Because in the summer range it was one of the big problems. And then when these people were all put on allotments, why that took care of the sheep and cattle wars. My father had quite a bunch of sheep shot one time. And it was really, really pretty hot. The last episode they had was in the edge of Bear Valley, between a fellow by the name of Emmett Cochran, and some cattlemen there. And old Emmett shot a finger off of old Ira Sproul, this Sproul family lives over there yet on that ranch, and in that fracas, that's the only blood that was shed. And this old Emmett was a rough and tough character. And so, he went to --- he had two bands of sheep going through there, and then he told these fellows that I'm going to go through there, and I'm not going to stop, and you better let me alone. And he was prepared for them, and then they decided to go up and shoot him up a little bit.

But --- and so then old Emmett rode into Canyon City the next night, and walked into the saloon, and old Ira was sitting there with his finger bundled up. He shot it off right next to the hand, just did a clean job of it. And so old Emmett said, "Well I'll buy a drink for all you SB's around here." Says, "Come on up and drink." And old Ira sat there for awhile, and pretty soon Emmett said, "Sproul you going to go up and have a drink, or am I going to have to come after you?" So, Sproul come over and joined him, and they later become real good friends, see.

MAN: Did you have anything to do with the CCC projects on the Malheur Forest?

JOHN: No, it was after my time that that come. Let's see, it would have been in '50, or, I'm trying to think when we first got the, the first camps come out. I went down to the Malheur, went to the Fremont in '32. It was '33 that they come out.

The Siuslaw had five camps, three right along the coast, and two inland camps. Well, they did a lot of good work in that country. It was --- and I really enjoyed working with it after I got

acquainted with what they were trying to do, and the kind of program it was. At first, I was skeptical, but I got indoctrinated pretty quick after I went to the Siuslaw.

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