Archer Smith, Jr.- Oral history interview
April 18, 2000. The interview was conducted
by James L. McConnell and Jerry Henderson.
The tape was transcribed by James L. McConnell

Note-text in parenthesis has been added for correction or clarity.

McConnell-This is an interview of Archer Smith, Jr. The interview took place on April 18th, 2000 in his home in Eastover, SC. Mr Smith is 89 years old. The interview was conducted by Jim McConnell and Jerry Henderson and is under the auspices of the Southern Forest Service Retirees Association. OK Archer, tell us about when you first started with the Forest Service.

Smith- I started, I arrived in Charleston, SC on April 9th, 1934, fresh from Penn State. Penn State, in those days, that was the depression. Penn State would give you your last semester without going to college if you had a job. At that time the CC (Civilian Conservation Corps) was opening up and the Forest Service was expanding so the Forest Service-I had two jobs, one with the Forest Service out of Charleston, SC, cruising timber and the other with the CC up in Pennsylvania. I didn't like it, the CC up in the cold climate. So I took the southern route and landed in Charleston. I didn't know what I was getting into but I got into it. I went through the start, the finish---

McConnell- What were you doing when they hired you? What was your job?

Smith- I was a timber cruiser. I was appraising land, buying timber, buying cutover land for the Forest Service to turn into national forest. This was the Francis Marion National Forest. It was open range country, it had been cutover mostly and burned every year. This was some of the south's biggest fire problem, it was fire. They were set to green the grass up and take care of the poor old cows out there that were grazing. So that's the job–

McConnell- Who was the land bought from?

Smith- The land was different timber companies. I forget the name of the big one but they had cut out and gone, all they had was the land. There was a little timber, a little cutover area, otherwise, most of it was big ownership. That was in the Francis Marion, what was know as the Wambaw Purchase Unit. It was, purchasing nearly a quarter of a million acres was nearly complete

when I got there but we still had the Long Cane and the Enroee Units to do up the Piedmont. Now, the Piedmont was a different situation. The Piedmont was an area of extensive cultivation, corn and cotton on good soil, soil that was good that was silt type and eroded very easily. Just a drop of rain would take it off. There were farms that just couldn't make it. The (Federal) Land Bank was the biggest land owner. It was during the depression. Nobody had any money. So we had an appraisal procedure we used, when the land was open or had any timber on it we measured the timber, appraised the price. But what they got wasn't very high. About $7.00 and acre, average. That was (19)34, (19)35, (19)36–

McConnell- Seven dollars an acre on both the Francis Marion and the Piedmont?

Smith- The Francis Marion was a little less. There wasn't much left down there. But the Piedmont, there were a few instances where it was bought from the Land Bank where you had some little timber. Mostly it was just worn out land. Up around Leeds-Chester you know how the Piedmont was all, up around Chester it was all gullies in there where you could take this building, five of them, six of them, seven of them dump them in and you would never see them. It was just awful. So we had, we were working with the Soil Conservation Service in re-establishing the land. The first thing we would do to a big gully was to turn the water. Take the water away from it. Then plant trees. Trees would, leaves would fall and cover the soil, seed would fall and sprout and pretty soon, three, four, five years you got a controlled gully. That's the easy ones. Some of the big ones you had to do some soil moving work. It was, I think, pretty successful. We were working in with the Soil Conservation Service too, in that they were pushing for ponds, small ponds on every farm for the cows, grazing. So, it worked out pretty good. So that was the Piedmont, there was a soil problem there. That was the main problem. We bought enough to make two purchase units. Established the Long Cane- (phone rings, recorder is cut off).

McConnell- Go ahead.

Smith- Well, it was amazing to me how, here we were down here, Yankees, who knew nothing about it, working on a problem which was a southern problem. And how much we didn't know about the south, about the soils, living conditions and everything. It was quite an eye opener to me. We forgot the Francis Marion(NF). If you've every been on the (Francis) Marion in the TiTi (aka Swamp Cyrilla, *Cyrilla racemiflora)* bays and the Hell Hole Swamp. That's a rough place, not

only from getting through it, in places you have to crawl. You don't walk, you crawl. We had to crawl to get cruising line samples to complete the appraisal. It was a tough place. Mosquitos were a dime a dozen. In those days you didn't have anything to the control of ticks. You put sulphur around your waist, in your shoes, never washed your cloths or pants, just stood them up in the corner. Your pants just stayed there awhile.

Anyhow, one thing that helped me was because I had some professors in the last semester that would come on a scheduled meeting and teaching us the civil service(exam). Penn State had records of the civil service, you never knew what they were going to give this year or the coming year. At least it gave you an idea of what the civil service was all about. Then when I got to South Carolina, Witherbee, out of Moncks Corner near Hell Hole Bay I had no car, no money, nothing so on weekends I just studied and boned for the civil service. In August of that year, (19)34 they had the civil service examination in Columbia. My boss, John Bennett, loaned me his automobile to get there, that's how I got there. There were fourteen of us took it and four of us passed it. Two of us were from Penn State. So I thanked (God for) that ability of having to walk, didn't interfere with what I wanted to do, I did just great.(Mr Smith later said his score was 79.8 and the national average was 85)

The mosquitos, we never solved that problem or ticks or red bugs. Fire, prescribed fire, we later put on the (Francis)Marion, that did a lot of good to control the ticks. That was a good forest tool. We still fighting loose fire. Down here, I still think it was a first rate tool. You want me to go on or what?

McConnell- Sure, where did you go when you left Witherbee?

Smith- I was on the Sumter(NF) until about (19)38. We bought the two (Piedmont) units, established a forest, the Sumter National Forest. Made two ranger districts, they changed that. We got that far. Even got as far as starting some game management. I was, I had some game management work in college so they gave me the job of forest game manager which I held for two or three months. Then along came an offer from Washington for fire jobs out west on the Region 5 national forests fire plan. Well, I always wanted to go to California, I was interested in forest fires so I took a job. I was making $2100 then so they said you have to go back to $2000, and pay your own way. (Mr Smith also married Meta Boykin Barnwell, July 17, 1937)

McConnell- That's a year, $2000 a year.

Smith- Yea, that's $2000 a year. I started at $100 a month. So I was doing alright, you could live on it. Anyhow, in the mean time I married a sweet southern girl. Been married about a month and told her we were going to California. All hell broke loose but she went. I told her I was going to bring her back. That's a promise I made. They sent me to the Sierra National Forest. That's in the middle of the Sierra Range. One of the old national forests, established in 1905. I was assistant to the fire chief who was the first ranger on that forest.

McConnell- What was his name? Do you remember what his name was?

Smith- Oh yea, Audie Wofford, nice guy. He used to tell some wild stories. In those days, they had two rangers on about a million acres on the Sierra forest. Just two of them, if you had a lighting fire, which was common, they would go and attack it and keep at it till rain came or something changed, the weather changed and they put it out. They kept on going. Most of them fought that way all summer. They were gone two months at a time. They had a pack horse, they lived off the land, they shot the deer, caught the fish and subsisted that way. That was rugged country. (5000 ft to 14,000 ft ranges) That country was rugged. My job out there was to assist in planning locations for fire stations. I would take occurrence maps and decide where they had the most fires, what you were going to do about it, how you could build what you needed to build, things like that. We did that for the whole region. One man on each forest, and then at the end of it, after two years we closed in, six or seven of us closed into Berkeley we planned the whole set-up for all of Region 8 forests, Region 5 forests, excuse me. And then I got a offer to go up to Upper Lake RD (Mendocinto NF) as assistant ranger and I took that. That was at the end of my second year. I was out there three and a half more years as ranger, assistant ranger. I was ranger on two districts. I had some good fire experience.

McConnell- Which two districts were they?

Smith- Upper Lake (RD)(Mendocinto NF) and the Paskenta(RD) (Mendocinto NF). Upper Lake was a fire district. That was my second district. I had a peculiar idea about fire prevention. You had to get out with the people. You had to get to know your people. They knew you and you knew them. They wouldn't do anything to hurt you. That's the attitude I took. I didn't have a fire. Never had a fire. So, later on, in the middle of my career I had a chance to go to Washington. I

wrote the fire prevention section in the manual. I don't know what happened to it since then but it worked. I took it to Alabama and I sat down with a district forester and his men and worked it . We spent a week, we went through all of it. It worked. Smokey Bear over there, they gave me the Smokey award when I retired for fire prevention work. (Mr Smith received the Smokey Bear Award for working with State Foresters) So I learned something there. Somebody did. Anyhow, California had the biggest of everything. The biggest earthquakes, the biggest floods, the biggest mountains, the biggest fires, oh yes, the biggest trees. The sequoias and the big tree redwoods, one-hundred, two-hundred feet high. In one area, twelve feet across. You couldn't see the tops of the trees. They were beautiful. So, it was a real experience for me to learn something about California. I think I did, oh I know I did the Service some good out there. It did me a lot of good too. I brought my wife home. I got out of the doghouse that way.

We had some nasty fires on the Sierra(NF) . We had a fire that started out on the upper San Joaquin Valley. Up where the San Joaquin Rivers comes up in the mountains. The mountains are 14,000 feet. It burned through 20,000 acres(mostly virgin timber). It burned seven days. We fought it with 700 men for seven to ten days. Finally, ran it off up into the granite country and it stopped it. I tell you it was a wall of fire 200 feet high. It just engulfed the trees, just a ball of fire. I never seen anything like it. There was no way to stop it. No way to stop it. Finally ran it out where it couldn't burn. We kept it from switching from one side of the canyon to the other. We did that. That's the only good we did, except staying with it till it put itself out. We had one spot fire on our side. I was with the ranger on our side of the river and the fire was on the other side where it spotted, all over. We had a four acre fire start, you could see it start. By the time I traveled, oh a quarter of a mile, it was four acres. It was volatile conditions. I had a crew with me and we got it out. We finished and the guys, a couple of them were smoking and he flipped his cigarette into the river and a big trout came up and grabbed that cigarette. So some fishing tackle showed up in our fire tools the next morning. They would check the fires and check the water, check the river.

A guard and I tried to cross the river to get on the other side. They had a place they wanted us to burn out. And we couldn't get across the river. It was awful swift and the guard had picked up a squirrel that he had found on the fire line. The squirrel had burned his feet and couldn't walk. It was tamed immediately. The guard tucked it into his shirt and carried it around in his shirt. And

he a I were assigned the job of crossing the river. Well, I had the radio he was a good swimmer, he got across. If I lost my radio we were done, because there was no way to talk to anybody. So I didn't (cross)–he just signaled for me to just stay. Don't try it. He went upstream and crossed that way. Found a way to cross and came back a couple of days later.

McConnell- Did he still have the squirrel?

Smith- No, I missed that. He was swimming in the river and the squirrel came out and got wet . The squirrel came out of his pocket, the last he saw was a little head bobbing down the river. So, so much for the squirrel. I often wonder what happened to that poor devil. Like the rest of us, I guess, he had to work his way out. Anyhow, that was-that was. I was--

We did another unusual thing out there. (In 1938) California started their prison training. They would take the prisoners out and train them (in)fire control methods. All the sooth-sayers said you can't do it, they were going to escape on you. Well, we'd get them back in a week, walking. They know if they escape they'd cut the program off. Now, I had one guy in my crew that was, had seventeen years in the hoosegow and he'd never been out. He was just overjoyed over it. He said, "I sure appreciate this." Nice guy, but he was in there. And so, that was why, I don't know what it is now but every since the this has been since (19)36. They didn't have a man try to escape. Stuck right with it. On the Mendocino forest we would go to Fresno and get the winos after they would calm down a little bit. Haul them a hundred miles and put them on the fire line. Put a crew(boss) to every six or eight men. A crew leader to six or eight men. Once they got over their binge they did all right. They would always gather at this one spot where we could go and hire them.

McConnell- That's a heck of a way to sober up, isn't it.

Smith- Yea, sober up miles from no where, walking. When I was out there California instituted the use of airplanes (in supplying fire camps in isolated areas). They were just starting (by)pitching food out for the fire camps from the air. I was on, I had a camp of 500 men spread over the mountain side, we had some out of the woods (sleeping) away from the camp. When the plane came over to drop the food he couldn't see the men and he kicked the, couple halves of beef out and they, one hit right in between two guys sleeping. One here and one there. The beef and the men all came up together.

Henderson- Did they all bounce?

Smith- They all bounced. No bone in the beef. That was something. Some of the things done were unusual. They found they could take a radio, a fragile radio, tie it tightly on a board and drop the board with a parachute and it would survive. And so, we did our communications that way. I was a good deal. So we saw the big trees, we saw beautiful California.

McConnell- How long did you stay out in California?

Smith- About five and a half years.

McConnell- Till when, what year?

Smith- It was (19)43. I was, my former boss back here had moved to Atlanta, the regional office, he was in charge of the emergency fire protection.

McConnell- Who was that?

Smith- Sears, H.M. Sears. Do you know him? No.

McConnell- We just want to get it on the tape. Who it was.

Smith- H.M. Sears, he and I came from the same county, Erie, Erie, Pennsylvania. He went to Penn State too. But, he offered me the job of heading up the emergency fire control program over the state for protecting the bombing areas. Where they, to keep the smoke down they could practice bombing. Especially up in Dare County, in uh Virginia, North Carolina. Thousands of acres of swamp, Titi swamp land that was turned into a bomb range. All the, a good part of the military in the east did their training there. There was, it was hellish fire country because it would burn the surface and get down in the peat. And the peat, you couldn't put the peat out. Water was the only thing you do with it, you could drown it. So you had a problem there. That was the main. The we had –

McConnell- That place has a name. What is it, Dismal Swamp?

Smith- That was the Great Dismal. That's in the northern part of North Carolina, up next to Virginia. This was Dare County, Floyd (Hyde) and Dare County. You don't walk through it. You either wade around it or sail. Thousands of acres of it. Anyhow, that was, that's how I got back. Then I got, I did several different things. I'd been in fire control, Division of Fire Control a couple of times, Regional Office in national forest fire control. Then I was two terms, some four years to eight years working with the states developing forest fire control system. I got in on fire simulator training. The Forest Service developed a fire simulator. Do you ever see it? Well, we ran

that for awhile. That was a good deal. Then I was the Assistant Supervisor on the South Carolina (NF) forest for six years.

McConnell- What years were those?

Smith- That was 41, (19)51 to (19)57. That's where I met Dave Devet. Or Dave Devet met me, I don't know which it was. He was out in Oklahoma, he was going to take, he's retired now but he bought my house. In the Forest Service, where I was you had to buy a house. Then you had to sell a house. About the time you bought one, you bought it on a buyers market and when you sold one, you sold it on a sellers market. Did I get that wrong? (Actually it was the other way-bought on a sellers market and sold on a buyers market) Anyhow, I had a hard time selling my house. We always had a hard time selling it. Then when you went to buy one, the prices were so high, on our wages, you couldn't hardly afford it. So that was what Dave was facing, he was coming back east to take my job. I (had) never met Dave.

McConnell- This house was where?

Smith- In Columbia SC.

McConnell- In Columbia, OK.

Smith- The telephone rang and I answered it said, this is Dave Devet, "Are you Archer Smith?" Yea, yea. "I want to buy your house". I told him, "Oh" I said "Don't you want to see it?" "Oh no, I had a friend that visited you and he gave me all the low down on it. I'll take it."
So I sold him the house, sight unseen. First time that ever happened to me. And the last time.

McConnell- Who was the Supervisor in South Carolina at the time?

Smith- Joe Riebold. He went in the war as a Marine. He was (a) Marine. Good forester. So, I was in the Division of Fire Control several times for national forests in the region. One under Joe—wait. I'll give you this if you want it.

McConnell- In South Carolina, before you left here, tell us about Hurrican Hazel (1955) and the fire.

Smith- Hurricane Hazel?

McConnell- There was a fire associated with it, right? Did the hurricane put the fire out?

Smith- No that was, we had a fire in Hell Hole Bay. Now Hell Hole Bay was just like we had in North Carolina. We had this Titi composition, peat soil. The peat soil was five, six foot deep.

With normal rainfall you had a lake. Well we had a lake, we didn't have any fire. But then it during that drought period in (19) 53, 54 it was the lake, water disappeared. Salamanders which ordinally go into hibernation appeared. And uh, we had a wildlife biologist who worked with the state on the transfer of deer and turkey, he came over with his bulldozer and he dug up, with the big dozer, dug up this huge pile and turned up these salamanders and we didn't know what they were, he didn't know what they were so he took them to the Charleston Museum and they identified them. They were in suspended hibernation until he dug then up.

But that fire, we fought it for forty days. Never could put it out. We had eleven major break overs on it. So finally, Hazel, Hurricane Hazel came through, right up the South Carolina coast, about wiped out Pawleys Island. Dumped eleven inches of water on our fire and put it out.

McConnell- That was in what year? Do you remember?

Smith- That was in (19)55. That was the only good thing Hazel did that we know of. So.

McConnell- Then where did you go?

Smith- I went back to the Regional Office. Twice in fire control there. The Division of Fire Control. We had fire out west. We had fire up in the — Oh, I didn't tell you about the fire in Maine, Bar Harbor. It was on a national park. Bar Harbor area is a national park (Acadia NP.) The dump at the harbor, Bar Harbor, caught on fire, spread to the woods. They were in a drought just like I mentioned in Hell Hole. The whole northeast was plagued with fires. The Forest Service or anyone else couldn't go in there and help. The Park Service called on the Forest Service for help, men that had been in western fires, had western fire experience. So (Emera) Renshaw and I and twelve others went up--

McConnell- Who is Renshaw?

Smith- Renshaw was ah, well he finally ended up as Forest Supervisor of the Nantahala. He was a western man from , western man up in Idaho-- Missoula, Montana. He knew fire. He and I knew fire. Our job, since we were in State and Private Forestry, my job was working with the town, towns. Every so often you have a township. This fire line, the town would pick it up when the fire got across their line.

McConnell- Sat there and waited for it?

Smith- Sat there and waited for it. They wouldn't do anything till they had to. Then we had

a difference of opnion, we had an argument with them on the back fires. They didn't want to back fire. So, finally we had a place where we had a Navy tug out in the Somes Harbor (Somes Sound) pumping salt water in to the fire line. We would bring in, about a mile, and dump it in canvas bags and then have another pump, hand pump, I mean a portable pump. Then we'd pump that up, take it another half mile. We had a fire line, hose line around that whole 20,000 acres of fire.

McConnell- Pumping salt water on it?

Smith- Salt water, the we spread one area where, called –corners, RaggedyAss corners. The big thing was grass. When the fire was coming toward Raggedy-Ass they uh.

McConnell- We're still in Maine now?

Smith- That's on the map. The fire went out before it got to the field. Well, then the fire cranked up again and was coming to the field, we tried to back fire the field and it wouldn't back fire. There was calcium chloride in the salt water and made it fire proof. It wouldn't burn so we let it go. Couldn't do it. Just watched it. So we watched it. Finally went out. We had some real fire experiences.

Then in the west, I admired the western fellows, especially the states. I know that at a national meeting. I roomed with a fire boss from the state(California) and I asked him, "What about these airplanes. Are they any good ?" "I see them flying low and dropping stuff on the fires. What about it?" He said, "That's for show. They don't do a damn bit of good. It can't put them out. They won't stay out. The fire spots a mile, two miles, three miles, they have shake shingles on the houses. Houses catch on fire and blow up, scatter more sparks. Sparks (scatter) two or three miles. Only thing you can do, Santa Anna wind, you've heard of that, when it blows when you have and low pressure in the ocean and a high pressure on the other side of the high Sierras . The high Sierra builds up and the air blows through those passes 13,000 feet like water and a steady wind and a fire there, it'll take it and you can't do a thing about it. I've thought and thought for years and year and years and I've yet to put one out." That's what you're living with out there. That's the biggest out there. That's the biggest fires.

I had another interesting job in the Regional Office(R-8). It was going around to these different ranger districts in the east here to see what they live in. A lot of them were just like we were. You got transferred and didn't have money to buy one. You had to rent one and it wasn't

in the right place or wasn't suitable. So we'd do like we did in the west, we'd build houses so that was the question. Now I had to answer. Spent a year with Larry Mays in State and Private, Operations. And I went from ranger district to ranger district to see what their needs were in ranger housing. We bought four or five houses, otherwise the ranger was out there in the boon docks somewhere. Not very good. Not like Schaap's house there at Wahlalla. (Reference to Ranger Lester Schaap on the A. Pickens District, Sumter NF, Walhalla, SC). Not like that. He had a good place. I mean, we had a good place there.

McConnell- I guess the CCC built that house.

Smith- Yea, that's right. Then I was on several fires in the east here. That on in Maine, Bar Harbor, that was the worse one. We had a couple at Iron Mountain in Tennessee. They were pretty rough.

McConnell- They were on the Cherokee (NF)?

Smith- Yea. One was, I remember I was Assistant Supervisor here in South Carolina so they wanted a division boss so they sent me. I got there and they gave me 150 National Guard. We went out and built a line right up the mountain and got a nice good dandy job before the fire ever got there. They went and took the National Guard out but no one took me out. I stayed there about two nights waiting for somebody to pick me up. Probably Lou Whipple, who was the (Assistant) Fire Chief, he was Hartman's(R-8 Fire Division Chief) assistant, he found me out there, finally. Bought me back in town. I hadn't eaten in a couple of days. Later when I was in the national forest fire they needed a fire chief on the Cherokee. They had a 5000 acre, I think a 5000 acre fire, I think on this same mountain. They had a line down the mountain, tied it in, but the line was in heavy cutover, very heavy brush. They were afraid to set it on fire(back fire). So they asked me, they wanted a fire boss and I went out as fire boss and that was the first thing they did, take me out there where they were going to back fire this line to see what we could do. Well, I showed them some back firing tricks, prescribed burning tricks I don't think they ever had a chance to know about. The fuel was up a slope up the mountain. The wind was going up the mountain. The wind was in our favor and they had cut the line right through a big cut over, big high brush so I said, "We'll go back in here a ways and -----end of side A.

Start of side B.

Smith- Anyhow, we had the fire, we had three crews setting fire. One way up there hundred, two hundred feet ahead, set it slowly so the wind would take this fire up toward the main fire backing down the ridge. Then, I had another crew come down a little to our fire line and they did the same thing. They were behind, behind this lead man. Another, and then a third. And we burned that whole area out. Fire just roaring right up the mountain side. Man, it was hot. But we did what we wanted to do, we got chopped over area burned out and the fire line safe. The fire was out, right now.

So fire was out and then we got into the fire simulator. That was a neat trick. Training, fire training I find in the Forest Service was, when you have fire you have fire training. When you don't have fires you don't have any fire training. So, guess what, we have a lot of time when we don't have any fires so men get complacent, they get, a lot on the ball, they get a lot of fire and they burn the tail off you. Prevention, you got to keep that up or you, that's the easiest way to stop a fire, is to prevent it. Then you go the other way. But it takes work to do that too. You got to plan for it and do it. Anyhow, then, I got some, I did a lot pretty good work with the, some of the states. You go off in their organizations, first in North Carolina. They had some big fires. They didn't have some of planing, fire planning knowledge that we have. I would go up, go with them once in awhile, sit with their plans chief and go out on the fire with him, big fire. Course we were just a planing, help him plan, bring in the crews. But the main thing was watch your weather, watch your weather. And when your weather was changing you're not going to need all these men out there, you need to cut them off. And you should cut them off. It was interesting. I don't know, are we going right?

McConnell- Talk about in South Carolina when Joe Reibold then the even age management he was putting into the Francis Marion. I think it was done first, wasn't it?

Smith- Yea, that's right. Well that, that was a tough fight . The region was, Hartman(R-8 Fire Chief) was with us but Smokey Bear was with a lot of the states. The national office didn't want to mess with Smokey. They did want to promote fire. Fire is a good tool, as with any tool you want to use it where it'll do the most good. Even age management you got, with even age management on the Marion you got a lot of longleaf. Now longleaf is a fire species. You can, longleaf is high and grass you can burn everything off. Burn the needles off the bud. But the bud

will sprout. It 's got a bud, a tight bud on it and it'll protect it. Loblolly pine won't do that, it'll burn up, take it off. In some places where you got natural stands of longleaf we're trying to keep it. It's a good a species as any. And so, the Marion was a good place to practice prescribed burning. Where you have a lot of longleaf and where you have even age management. All the stuff that bothers un-even age management you have no change of, if your ruff is going to build up and you be sorry some day you have that much ruff. When a fire comes through takes out you loose the whole stand. The fires going to get hot enough to kill everything. That's been proved time and time again. Especially in the west. A lot of environmentalists don't like fire. They like smoke. But I some places like in a fire place you got to have a little smoke now and then to have the heat. To me, as a forester you're going to have fire, prescribed burning, in even aged stands of longleaf to bring them through. It's a fire species and well adapted to fire we should take good mind of it. We had a hard time getting permission to do it. Finally it came and we did it, and I think we're still doing it, burning 40 or 50,000 acres down on the Marion. We wrote a book on it too. Some people copied it and didn't give us much credit, but we wrote it anyhow, about prescribed burning. Not a book, a hand out you know. Research got into it. They had never done anything in prescribed burning. They took up what we had done and made something,something out of it. Well,--

McConnell- You ever run across any snakes down there?

Smith- Yea, hee, hee are you kidding.

McConnell- Your son said you had some pretty good snake stories.

Smith- When we started I had bought a pistol, a Colt automatic. I never saw so many snakes in the swamps. Big cottonmouth, cottonmouth moccasin. You wading through swamp, you have to wade through because your line says go through it and so you went through it. You see every hummock has a snake on it. If you carried a gun and shot at a snake every time you never get your work done. So we got so, they didn't bother us so we're not going to bother them. So we would just go on through.

One time Archer (my son) and I went fishing at a pond out here on the edge of town, Columbia, and what's the name of that pond. (Mrs Smith respond with Pinewood) Pinewood, we were up in the upper part in one of those rubber boats called Tube-big, tube big. We were casting

and looked over in a bush there, from here to Babs (Mrs Smith), no a little bit closer, there was a great bug moccasin all coiled up. I said, "Hold it son, I'm gong to take a swat at him." "Oh, don't bother him, Dad". I took a wack at him with one of the paddle, he rolled off in the water , Art almost slid out of the boat – "Dad"(he said) .

One thing I would never forget on the Marion about a snake was, we were coming back one night the evening and we had some rough going, you had to crawl, and it was hot. Each of us had a gallon of water, it was100 percent humidity, and 100 percent temperature. Water just went in you and out. We were tired, we were whipped. Coming in we came down a old tram road (logging railroad). My compass was ahead of me and I was following it closely and all of a sudden, ahhh. He stopped and ahhh , he grabbed a bunch of air and sucked it in. Made a lot of noise and I said, "What's the matter here." Ahhh to me. " Just stay where you were, stay where you are, don't move." I snuk back and got a big piece of limb and clobbered him. It was, oh ,a big moccasin. It was big one. That was the day I sweated off sixteen pounds, and were in condition. Just that heat So we got one snake.

The snake I respect more than any is the copper mouth, copperhead. Can't see them. He blends right in the brush and everything. Leaves and bushes. It's hard to see, but you got to watch. And they don't tell you about a rattlesnake, well. In the west, we had----my bother-in-law, her brother (reference to Mrs Smith) came out to visit us and I took him down the San Joaquin River fishing. There were ledges there, coming down the river. All long the ledge there would be a cool spot, that's where the snakes, rattlesnakes would be. This is rattle country. And I said, "Bill, walk on top of the rocks. Don't get your foot down where, below the rock where something----". "OK" (He said). So he was going along, he forgot what he was supposed to do. He stepped down off the place and– First thing–Z--ZZZZZ, ZZZZZZZZ! He jumped and ----, "See, that's what I told you". (I said).

He didn't get struck.

McConnell- Tell us some more about the fire manual you wrote. It was in the Washington Office, wasn't it?

Smith- Yea, three months. They wouldn't let us come home because, unless we could show on our expense account that it was cheaper to travel home, to be home, than it would be to stay there.

Did you hear me.

McConnell- Yes, we faced that too.

Smith- So, morale, it was tough. She had to raise the kids. And thank God they raised well. Anyhow–

McConnell- Well, who helped you with the fire manual?

Smith- They had people from all over. They were writing– They gave me the prevention section and I don't know why. I don't know who did it, that's what I had. And then I sent it in, turned it in and nobody even changed it. I don't if anybody ever looked at it. They didn't say much about it, but I took it to Alabama one time and tried it and it worked. I knew it would work, Worked it down on the (Francis) Marion pretty good. Now I worked it out in California pretty well.

McConnell- In the prevention section, what was your philosophy in the (fire) prevention?

Smith- Get to know the people.

McConnell- Get to know the people.

Smith- Get to know your people. Work with your people. Be friends with your people. They would respond. Takes a mean, pretty mean person, oh yes, I had a guy, he was an old timer, a range man. He was always good for burning. We knew he was for burning. When he got sick and we knew he needed to get to the hospital. Out there we had no ambulances so I sent a pick-up up and blankets and put him on the pick-up, on a cot, took him in to the hospital. I went to see him, got to know him a little bit. Never had any trouble even had a friend. So, you need help when you are out there, you're vulnerable. You got a fire situation and if you got some mean people, if they don't like you, you're going to get it. And so, that's my philosophy.

McConnell- It was probably against the regulations to haul him, though, wasn't it?

Smith- Huh?

McConnell- It was probably against the regulations, somehow, to haul a civilian down–?

Smith- Oh sure. What do you do?

Henderson- What do you do, let him stay up there and die?

McConnell- It paid off in the long run.

Smith- Why sure. But I was careful too. I didn't want–chuckles. And I don't think I told anybody. But that fire on the, on the--- Walhalla (SC) that time, that---

McConnell- Brasstown fire?

Smith- Brasstown fire.

McConnell- Easter Sunday.(1954)

Smith- Yea, ole Schaap (Ranger Lester Schaap)–

McConnell- What year was that? I don't remember. I don't know . That was before my time.

Smith- It was in the, I was Assistant Supervisor. It was our fire, I made the fire plan for the forest after from the western experience. Every man, ordinarily would go out and work all day and all night and all day and the Assistant Supervisor will come out as soon as he gets notified of the fire and take over, run the night shift, and then the ranger come in the morning, freshened a little bit. That was the plan. But on that, this fire, it was so unusual, I think it intrigued Schaap. Not only intrigued him, it scared the pants of him and the, because the fire was on the ground and it was, sparks would go up, straight force of wind from the west would come over. Big band of wind and would just pick up those sparks and take them and bring them down on the other side. It never had happened to us and we never knew anything like that happened and, but there it was. Schaap did the smart thing and the only thing, it was smart. Pull out, get your men out, get your men, get your men get them back where the fire was going and ready to attack it when it gets there. You know it's going to happen so you know the wind's going to die down too. So be ready to go when it hit, so that's what he did. I think he struck it about midnight and I got there about four o'clock that morning I took over from him everything was going fine. And we had a line around it by six o'clock. Then about seven o'clock Schaap showed up, showed up again. I was supposed to relieve him all night but he wouldn't go. He said, "I couldn't sleep. I'll just fall out the cot". What do you say to a guy like that? Well, I am a poet, do you know that?

McConnell- No, we didn't know that.

Smith- Un hun, I wrote the, I get started every now and then. I write something.

McConnell- OK.

Smith- Right now, we're in old age, you know.

McConnell- Sure.

Smith-

Pills and ills

Pray tell old pill, just what ill

Are you being taken for?

Pray tell old pill, just who's ill

Are you working for?

If all the pills for all the ills

Could ever be counted ,

The score would stretch from where I am

To way past infinitum.

So when you take those pills you're taking,

Just question what you're doing.....

Will all those pills really help your ills

Or just be part of your undoing?

McConnell- That's wonderful.

Smith- Then I wrote one about nature's might. After big hurricane here. Out of hurricanes, earthquakes.

It's called, Natures Might.

Much of Yellowstone's firs and pines

Swept by fire in such short time

Brought home a lesson in plain sight

The solemn truth of natures might!!

Then, Hugo's blast through the Carolinas

So toppled the biggest oaks and pines,

Bringing man's structures down to earth

Making most of little worth.

And, his mighty wave that with fiendish glee

Lifted shrimp boats from the sea

Showing whether wrong or right

The painful truth of natures might!!!

Then the earthquake that rattled California's bones
Bringing bridges and buildings down the prone
Causing man such tremendous loss
Showing that nature still is boss.
Yet, this morning's sun so bright and clear
Making ice clad trees a chandelier
that glistened and sparkled oh so bright
Showing more truth of nature's might.

This is just a diddy here.
From the alphabet comes the letter "e"
which changes words so magically.
Just add one "e" to "the" and it becomes "thee".
And "butt" becomes "butte",
"Mut" changes to "mute",
and "cut" to "cute".
Then an "e" to "har" comes out to "hare",
and "tar" to "tare",
"mar" to "mare",
and "car" to "care",
Even "war" to "ware".
To end this "e" show
to gardening we must go.
And with a "ho, ho, ho" ,
Plus and single "e",
we can "hoe, hoe, hoe"
with fun and ease.

General laughter by all.

Smith- There you go.

McConnell- So that's what you been doing? Writing poems.

Smith- No, I do that, I can't do anything else. I got to be relaxed and quite. When I got on something, I got to keep after it. Sometimes she don't understand me but she tolerates me. Lets see anything else here. Oh, I told you when I retired they gave me the Smokey Bear (Award), which was a rather nice thing to do.

McConnell- It was wonderful. Not many people have that.

Smith- No, just a few. It was a good trick.

McConnell- The fire simulator.

Smith- Yea, Merl Lowden, he took a lot to get that going. He did a lot in promoting it.

McConnell- Who did?

Smith- Merl Lowden. He was chief of the Forest Service fire control in Washingnton.

McConnell- OK, How do you spell Lowden?

Smith- Lowden? L- o- w- d- e- n-.

McConnell- OK

Smith- He was a good guy. I liked him very much. He got with a professor up there in Washington and they. He had some ideas and the professor has some ideas and they developed the fire simulator. It was a bank projectors (slide projectors), on a screen. One would throw a country scene a mountain scene, trees, brush. Topography, roads, buildings, in a panorama. Then, another projector would project, you could project a white light on it and make it look–then another projector would project red light on it and you could put a little red on, put these light and make a little smoke and make smoke, a lot of smoke and you had a fire. Then you bother your trainees who would sit down just like a crew boss. Crew on these were all crew bosses but they acted as crew leader and crew members. But they would all figure the problem, they were told how much, how much, what the weather was, what the time was, what the fuel type was, what the weather forecast was, and then the rest called the dispatcher. One person, just like on a fire called the dispatcher, release some more men., see. Then the dispatcher would say, "Well you got one crew. That's all we got. What do you want us to send you?" So this guy had to make decisions. This fire would keep on spreading, see. The whole team had to agree on what this fire was going, what were we going to need and a report would come in to the fire boss that the fire had jumped the line or something. What do I do? Then

the boss, fire boss would make a map, and make a decision. It was excellent for putting a man on a spot. Getting ready for fire, any simulator put on a spot, make him go through the things you go through. It was– It did a lot of good. We had one team in Alabama, Merlyn Dixon. I don't know if you remember Dixon. He was one of the instructors. And we had a guy in a tent, crew in a tent and we heard the crew boss, that was in training, Merl, this fire is do damn real, I can smell the smoke. And Nick, Nick had gone out a got some pine cones, pine straw in a bucket and put them under the thing there where it would suck the air in he was smelling smoke. We had something like that when Dave Devet took that simulator and said, "That's a good thing." He would go off and call it the poor man's simulator where he didn't use radio, you would just sit in a dark room and you talk just like you would talk on the radio. And you can't tell where it's coming from, but you hear it, see, so you get the same results of, of ----I'm in trouble boss, what do I do? Where do I go? So, it was cheap, poor man.

All right, things had got up to about a hundred miles an hour, or ninety, maybe. But she did tremendous damage at Pawleys Island (reference to Hurricane Hazel).

Henderson- That's down south of the (Francis) Marion, right?

Smith- East of the (Francis) Marion, between Myrtle Beach and Georgetown. There were a lot of houses built, before Hazel came, they didn't have any hurricanes. A long of time they weren't having hurricanes on the coast so the people got thinking, it would never happen. So they would build a slab out of cement, and put the house on a slab of cement. The slab of cement was just about a foot or two off the water level and when the, this hurricane wind came along and built up the wave from the ocean and we know from this one here, from which we called Hugo, it would get up to twenty feet. And it would pick the shrimp boats right out of the sea and dump them right up in the dock or to inland. And, but Pawleys Island it did more than that. It hit this concrete block it went undermine, undermine, and wash the dirt from underneath, underneath the house. And then the whole block of cement would tilt and the whole house would go into the ocean. Tremendous loss. And, there was nothing you could do about it. So, you had, stilts were the only answer. It you're going to build near the ocean or out of the ocean, get on stilts. That's what Hazel taught. They listened to Hazel. But Hazel was a couple of years before Hugo. And Hugo was, that was a rough one. It took one, here we are, a hundred miles inland and it took– It was a hundred and nine miles

an hours at Shaw. (McEntire Air National Guard Base) which is twenty, fifteen miles east of us. It picked up, it uprooted a great big Northern Red Oak, this big around right in the corner of our house. Changed that way, it was coming this way, blew that we never did hear it. This house is so insulated the we never did hear the wind blowing. But then we had nieces and nephews from Mt Pleasant near Charleston. They had come up to get out of the way of the hurricane. The hurricane just followed them right up the—. But they, the noise, it was noisy upstairs so they came running downstairs and were getting scared and the---. Well what happened, the door, and then I heard the racket so the insulation cut, you hear all the racket the hurricane was making. The needles beating everything and all the wind and the noise. That tree was down. And that tree up here, another one here and knocked the top off and it was down, it was down right in the front. And the one in the middle of the house, it was blowing like , go anytime and this one here, this big one , I was worried about that, because if that come across the house we're in trouble. So, but this one out here, the roots, I couldn't stand on the ground and touch the tops of the roots, just a mass of roots but eighteen inches of water with the rain. And it had soaked the soil and that wind hit it . I lost about a hundred trees. Good size trees.

McConnell- How many acres do you have here?

Smith- Twenty----two. Twenty, twenty acres.

McConnell- You built this house yourself?

Smith- Well, we built the plan our self. I did all the interior work. But the plumbing, electrical work and the foundation, the footing and the roof. I did roof it. I put sheeting on but we didn't put the shingles on. We got that done. And the rest of it, all the interior trim, I did it, somebody did it. Remember who came up and helped put the doors on, remember? (Speaking to his wife). Rip Williams. Did you ever know Rip?

McConnell- Yea.

Smith- Bless his heart, he came up when we were building the house.

McConnell- Big, tall, blond headed guy.

Smith- Yea, helped up put the doors on our closets back here. I had a lot of good friends.

Mrs Smith- What's his name? Cartwright, Cartwright built some closets out there for us.

Smith- Yea, Cartwright (James).

Mrs Smith- (Louder) Cartwright built some closets out there for us.

Smith- Yea, out here.

McConnell- Cartwright built the closets.

Smith- Do you know Cartwright?

McConnell- I've heard of him, yea.

Smith- He was a good man. Carver, wood carver, wood worker. He's dead now. He made ninety, ninety, I think.

All right, let's see. I done a lot of work since then. I've done work for, not only county, reporter for the county council getting federal money. How to spent their money, a little bit. On a thirty man board. I don't think we did any good. Calling on the politician is tough. Forty-one–

McConnell- Start over again. When you came here in forty-one--

Smith- No, no fifty---. Fifty-four.

McConnell- OK,

Smith- Fifty-four. They hadn't done much on the Chauga (river in Oconee County, SC) or the Chattagooa (river in Oconee County, SC. Part of the boundary between SC and GA) either. From the west I could see the big potential, floating and everything else. So we got some roads in there and got the state interested in the, putting more fish in and it helped it. We, we moved—do you know Duffy Holbrook?

McConnell- Oh yea.

Smith- Duffy was the, oh I thought a lot of Duffy. He ran the state handling of the federal land there, game area down on the (Francis) Marion. He was the one that raised the fifties deer, the fifties turkeys we put on the, on Newberry (SC), Whitmire (SC. The Sumter National Forest). And also the fifty we put in at McCormick (SC). He was a good biologist, I thought.

McConnell- He lives down there on the coast now, somewhere.

Smith- Yea, he was a real fisherman. He really didn't want to get too far from fishing.

McConnell- When he worked in the Regional Office, he would have Coca-cola for breakfast every morning. He was rather particular, but anyway. It did him good.

Smith- When we had that Hell Hole fire he ran the bulldozer, put a ring around the whole fire. And he had that Mathis plow (fire line plow), that big disc plow. It would form a deep trench.

It's deep. And that furrow, after the hurricane, it was such a mass of growth in there that the, just full of ducks, ducks just flocked in there. More duck than anyone ever seen. So Duffy and I got the idea, we would see if we could burn that thing every year now that we got it, bit fire line around it. And keep that grass down. Keep that, do a lot of prescribe burning, prescribe burning is good for game. So we wanted to do that. So we decided to go down, well let's go down and take a look at it. We took a row boat and put in on the edge of the fire and poled, rowed around the whole seven miles of fire line on that five-hundred acre fire. And we were, so we laid claim to that, we were the only man in existence that ever rowed a boat around a fine line. We never could, never, always get rain. You had to have a dry period there, you never would get the dry period again, like we got in the drought of (19)54, 53 and 54. So, it was the, we never got to do what we wanted to do, make that a permanent wildlife area. It's screwed up now, I guess. But there was more liquor made in that country. Chuckles–

Have you been, how long have you been with the Forest Service? Do you remember?

McConnell- Thirty-six years.

Smith- Thirty-six. That is what I had. I had one year of sick leave though that I never had, I accumulated. So they gave me one more year of service. Chuckles Where were you mostly.(tape recorder is cut off)

McConnell- Talk about the naval stores experience.

Smith- Yea, That was in (19)36, or 36. That was before I got married. I was, we ran out of money on acquisition so they put me on the naval stores. I went down to, took a Forest Service and went down to Jacksonville and spent five, six months on the naval stores. That was when you–

McConnell- That was Jacksonville, Florida? OK.

Smith- Yea.

McConnell- OK.

Smith- You had to, guy got paid for taking faces or boxes out, out of the production. And so, all you did was counting how many boxes that were not being used. And the–

McConnell- This was what year?

Smith- (19)37.

McConnell- 37, OK, yea.

Smith- 36, 37.

McConnell- Did you know James McArthur?

Smith- No.

McConnell- OK. He worked on the navel stores project and I'm going to go interview him.

Smith- I was, I think they just stuck me in a hole. Chuckles.

McConnell- And they were actually paying people not to box the trees? Is that what they were doing?

Smith- Yea, they paid, it was an agricultural control program, over production. So they pay you to not produce.

McConnell- And you were, you were keeping up with them?

Smith- So I would just go out and count the boxes. Or figure what he said was a good figure. As long as that gave you, some of them didn't know what they had either so–. It was a screwy program while I was there. Something wrong when you have to pay somebody for not doing something. Don't you think?

Henderson- Yea.

End of interview.