

CLIFF MILLER
USPS REUNION 2000
Dave Filius, Interviewer

I will be interviewing Cliff Miller. The occasion is the 3rd USFS Reunion, which is being held in Missoula, Montana on September 6, 2000.

Cliff, maybe we could get started and you could describe a little bit about when you were born, where and how you came to get into your profession. Tell a little bit about your early life.

I was born in Dallas, Texas in 1925. My father was a cabinetmaker. Their company made specialized fixtures for stores and banks, and stuff like that. I have one sister, who still lives in Dallas, Texas. I attended Orem Roberts Grade School in Dallas and then J. L. Long Junior High and then Woodrow Wilson High School. At the time I got out of high school I went immediately into the Army in World War II and was in the Army Air Corps. During my time in the Army, I found out that other things in life could be more than being a cabinetmaker, or something like that, and I got interested in engineering work, being an aircraft mechanic. When I got out of the Army, I went to school at Texas A&M University at College Station, Texas where I studied civil engineering and graduated from there in 1950. From that I went to work for the Texas Highway Dept. and I had previously taken the civil service examination, one of the last ones that was given. It was a true examination all day test. I was contacted by the Forest Service by telegram asking me if I would be interested in a job. I was. So here I am.

When I got the telegram from the Forest Service asking if I was interested, I immediately proposed to my bride-to-be. We got married in two weeks. I started on a unique career with the Forest Service. I consider my career with the Forest Service rather unique as I started at the Washington office and I worked my way down, as I tell my friends. I got moved from Washington, D.C. to Region 1 and then I went to Region 5, then Region 10, back to the Washington office, back to Region 1, then to Region 4. I have decided that maybe I should not try any more regions after that.

I was an engineering trainee at the Washington office. I was to go in there for six months and then come out and be transferred to a region somewhere. During that time Congress passed a law and you could not be transferred or promoted within a year. You had to be in grade a year. Following that year in Washington I moved to Region 1. In Washington, D.C., as a young trainee I had the privilege of getting to see how the Forest Service operated. I thought I was going to work for the Park Service. I had traveled in the mountains of Colorado and Wyoming and I did not know anything about the Forest Service. At that time, I started learning that the Forest Service was different than the Park Service and I learned that the Forest Service did things I was interested in. As a trainee in the Washington office I got to help prepare exhibits for hearings at Congress and got to go along with the Chief and other officials in the timber management, engineering, and to watch how it happens in there. After one year in Washington, D.C, I was

transferred to Flathead National Forest in the Kalispell. Ed Morris was forest engineer who had just returned from an assignment in Venezuela. Fred Nysling was the forest supervisor.

My first week on the job, being a newlywed with one year of marriage, I went to fire camp for training and then the next week I headed off for the Spotted Bear Ranger Station with Charlie Shaw as the district ranger. That was an experience and a half to move in to Spotted Bear with all the stock fresh off the range and watch them try to pack stock that had been on the range for all winter. We worked on the South Fork Road near there in Hungry Horse Reservoir was under construction at that time. Then, after a period up at Spotted Bear, I worked on different road location projects around on the Flathead. My first road job I located was up to the fire fighter lookout down by Big Fork Ranger District. After that I did different location jobs around on the Flathead.

After a year on the Flathead, they wanted me to go to the Kaniksu National Forest. I was the assistant forest engineer on the Kaniksu and there was not any forest engineer at that time. Karl Klehm was the forest supervisor and was a fascinating forest supervisor who was THE FOREST SUPERVISOR, and do not forget it. Working for Karl Klehm and then Harold F. Horschel as the forest engineer during the spruce bark beetle days. We would work twelve days straight and then get two days off, at which time we prepared to get back out in the woods for the next two weeks. After two years on the Kaniksu Forest, I got offered a job to go to the Cleveland National Forest in California. As we described it down there, it was a 13-month fire season. People I worked with were as follows: Walt Puhn, Forest Supervisor; Al Wright, Fire Control Officer; later Bob McBride arrived as Fire Control Officer. Bob had fire control, timber and other resources and was-a-forest engineer. I was responsible for the engineering on the forest plus recreation, lands and being the forest safety officer. That was a unique experience working on the Cleveland National Forest.

From there I was transferred to Juneau, Alaska in Region 10 to be a transportation planner for the region. Region 10 at that time in 1957 had never had a road plan of any sort and we were starting to develop our logging systems up in Alaska. So, the only job I had was preparing a forest transportation plan for the Region. I became well knowledgeable of Region 10 in the national forest there. This would have been from 1957 to 1960, I think. At that time, I also got to participate with the State of Alaska. I voted against statehood for Alaska because I had worked representing the Forest Service on several task force studies on statehood, and in my opinion, we could not afford statehood at that time. Oil had not been discovered in Alaska. Alaska did not have a judicial system. It did not have a jail system. It did not have a lot of the things that we normally accepted. If they had statehood come along, we would have had to have a gasoline tax of, like 50 cents per gallon, just to maintain what roads we had, but it was interesting.

The transportation planning was an interesting process. I had a young forester who worked for me to help me identify and estimate the volume and the drainages and the type of trees that were in there and how we might log those areas. The transportation plan was finished. I also worked with the new State of Alaska in the early stages of planning the ferry system that now serves southeast Alaska. It is fun to take trips back up there and see how it has happened overtime. Most of the logging and road systems out on Prince of Wales Island follows the original plan that I developed and dreamed up. Other areas have gone into wilderness areas and other designations, like Admiralty Island is now all wilderness but at that time we had a transportation plan for the whole island.

After Alaska I went back to the Washington office and had a unique job of being the staff person in charge of federal power commission-type activities. The Forest Service, most people don't know early in the 1920's, was the Federal Power Commission. Most Forest Service engineers-not a lot of them-moved in to the Federal Power Commission at that time. The Federal Power Act required that the Forest Service report on hydro projects if they adversely affected the national forest and whether they were compatible with the national forest. We had to specify then what made them compatible. It was interesting to work with the different states and other federal agencies to come up with a plan to make power projects compatible with national forests. At that time the Forest Service functioned almost solely as the spokesman for the Dept. of Agriculture, so the job I had had more responsibility than I ever understood I had. It was me saying this is what the Forest Service says. As I worked in the job, I found out that the chief of the Forest Service and all the deputy chiefs placed a lot of responsibility on me and depended on me to give them good advice on whether we approved or did not approve of a project.

After being in the Washington office a while, I moved to Region 1 as the regional engineer. I was here from 1963 to 1972. It was a good job and I thoroughly enjoyed it. At that time, we had the accelerated works program that came on the Forest Service. We had an accelerated timber access road program coming down the line at us and at that time we also built six Job Corps camps here in Region 1. I think that was the highlight of having to build these camps and get them ready for the young men and women who were going to fall along in these camps. It was a growing process and a lot of the people who were involved in the Job Corps program were excellent to work with. To make the Job Corps program really go, we brought in a guy who had been a ranger on the Kaniksu when I was there, Vern Erickson. He was the head knocker. He had knocked everybody together to make things work: the landscape architects, the engineers, the soil scientists, everybody else who was involved. Vern was the guy who had to do the job. He was also known as the "Bald Eagle". (I do not know whether you knew Vern, Dave, but he was a fabulous guy to work with.) Also, we had the water pollution abatement program that came along during my time here in Region 1. That was a good job. To make that work the region decided that we would have a team of top people from all over the region who would work together to make these water pollution projects go and go quickly and that they would be done well. We had some of the best people in Region 1. It was also agreed that when we were done

with the project these people would get right back to the forest to make things happen. I am real proud that we were able to do that. Every guy that was on that team of water pollution people were highly desired by all the forest supervisors and they were waiting in line to hire every one of them.

After being in Region 1 I transferred down to Region 4 as regional engineer. It was a very unique experience for me being in Region 4. I had never dealt much with range management or such huge recreational program as we had in Region 4. My experience in ski lifts was not very good. I was not a skier. When I moved to Region 4, I found out I had to find out about ski lifts and all that activity. I also took up skiing. I enjoyed all my career in Region 4 because of its uniqueness and I think it was a good job to go down there and work with Vern Hamre in that region.

Other experiences I have had that were kind of highlights-one question I noticed we are talking about is fire duty. My first fire I went to was on the Kaniksu up in the North Fork. We had slash projects up there that got out of control when it quit raining. I did not know much about firefighting there. On the Kaniksu we did not do much firefighting. When I went to the Cleveland, I found out about firefighting. As a forest engineer when you went to Region 5, you found out you were the service chief on all major fires. I did not know what a service chief was, but I found out within about a month what a service chief job was. So, it was an excellent experience down there.

In Alaska we were just starting to grow as a region. Alaska region had ten ranger boats; they were called. They were the backbone of how the districts got around to work on projects. We lived on ranger boats and the boats would anchor out. We had a full-time skipper and you could probably walk three miles a day from the boat into a job and back out in one day and get some work done. The boats were not that fast and they were quite aged. The experience we had in creating a new ranger fleet, they decided they would go and build two new ranger boats of steel. After setting up all the specifications between the operations people and engineering, we asked the General Service Administration to hire a marine architect to design two boats for us. I do not remember the cost of them, but they were very expensive and it would be the Sitka Ranger and the Tongass Ranger (1958/1959) that were going to be built. A fellow by the name of Gerald Mitchell was the regional engineer and Mitch was an old Navy guy from WWII, who had spent a lot of time on the ocean in destroyers. One of the requirements in the contract for building these ranger boats, which were going to be made in Seattle, was that the pilothouse should be watertight. We did have rough water even in southeast Alaska. When it came time to do the acceptance inspection on the ranger boats, Mitchell went down to Seattle and he asked them if the pilot house was watertight. The contractor said, "Oh, yeah, it's watertight." Mitch said, "Well, give me a fire hose." They got a fire hose and Mitch turned it on the pilothouse and the water poured in, as you would expect. Then he said, "That's not watertight." About a month later, he goes back down to Seattle to accept the boats and he asked them if the pilothouse was watertight. "Yes, it's all watertight," they said. Mitch said, "Give me a fire hose." Mitch got the

fire hose again and he hit it at the pilothouse, and the water cascaded through. It still was not watertight. On the third trip back down a month later, he asked them if the pilothouse was watertight. They said, "Yes, and here's the damn hose." So, they did learn how to inspect watertightness. That was an experience.

Another experience I had unique to me was being the service chief in fire management in Region 5 on the Cleveland. I think a lot of people do not realize what is involved in firefighting and all the coverage you see in the press and so on is, rightly so, the people own the fire line, but behind the fire line is what is required to keep fire fighters moving and putting the fire out. On some of our fires we had in southern California, the Inaja fire, which was about an 80,000-acre fire. We had over 1800 people on that fire. That requires a lot of work to keep 1800 people fed, tooled and taken care of. Being a service chief behind the scene I think is a part of the firefighting activity that is not always appreciated and certainly not covered by the news media, but it's a story that needs to be told. Firefighting goes almost like a big army or war operation, when you really think about it. You think about all the equipment, all the people, the transportation, the feeding, the clothing, the sleeping, keeping warm and the comforts is a job that must be done by somebody. I was glad I was able to participate in that.

On the Inaja fire (1956), unfortunately, we had 12 people get burned up on that fire. They were trapped in unburned gases. The crew that was burned, eleven of them were county fire prisoners that were in the county prison system. They were honor members. They worked with us on the forest. Many of them I knew by first name. They were an honor crew that did recreational work for us on the forest. They prepared water systems for us. They did insect control in our campgrounds. They built tables for us. Then when we had fire duty, they would come to the fire lines and be part of our regular organization. On that fire we lost eleven of those men plus one Forest Service man, who was their foreman on the line. On that fire we had over 1800 people. As the fire wound down, we had crews from New Mexico-Indian crews. We had one crew, the Mescalero's who we used in fire camp. They kept our tools maintained; they kept us fed. We had a Navy chief officer cook who came in and kept the meals prepared for us. As the fire wound down, he came to me and asked if we could not have something special for that group of Indians who were doing such a good job for us. I said, "Yes. Find out what they want for their food." They did not like, necessarily, what we ate. That night for dinner we ordered 1800 16-ounce steaks for the fire crew, because we were getting ready to demobilize. The Indians asked for hot stuff, which we brought in for them, and they prepared very hot food for us. The cook came to me and said, "Don't eat that hot stuff, but put a little bit on your steak and test it." It was like eating FIRE! But those guys used it as butter on their bread and everything else. It was unique to deal with the different fire crews who came and help us out in Region 5. It was unique to work with prisoners from the county systems and the state prison systems. They were all honor prisoners. Last year I was able to be down in southern California and I got to by and see the memorial that was dedicated to the twelve men that we lost in that one fire. That was probably the worst fire I was on in my whole career in the Forest Service.

Cliff, you mentioned that you were an engineer in Region 1 during the beginning of the Job Corps era. Do you have any recollections about some of those centers- Cedar Flats, Anaconda, Curlew, Trapper Creek, some of those were important. I guess we even had one in Dickinson during those early days.

When the Job Corps program came along, we had criteria to follow in sizes of camps and so on. This region decided it would go with the Job Corps program and support it the best it could. We had camps being proposed for Trapper Creek on the Bitterroot, the Anaconda Job Corps camp over on the Deer Lodge, the Cedar Flats camp at Cottonwood on the Nez Perce, the Curlew camp on the Colville, and the Dickinson camp in North Dakota. The Curlew camp was an old Army Air Force radar station, which the Forest Service bought back from someone-a private individual. We had to restore the heating systems and many other parts of that facility to get it fully operational. Dickinson, North Dakota, was also an old Air Force radar facility, which we had to restore into full operation. The same was true with Cottonwood over in Idaho in the Nez Perce. Then we had to build three new camps from scratch: Anaconda, Trapper Creek, and Cedar Flats. Cedar Flats-we should have known better by the name-it was a cedar flat and a cedar bog. We used prefabricated buildings that were built and hauled in on the site. As we cleared it out, we found we had lots of water to cope with and many other problems.

The one thing that I do remember out of it was when we started putting in the sewage system and John Milodragovich, who was the forest supervisor at the time, found out how big of a sewer pond we were going to have to have. Milo says, "No, you're not going to make that much of a pond and clear out that much of the forest to put in a sewer pond." So, we had to come up with another system. We designed a sewage treatment oxidation ditch that we just circulated the sewage around in until it was able to be discharged into the Selway River. Another unique problem we had at Cedar Flats was when we put in the water system, we put a development out into the Selway River to pick up the water through a filtered trench and we were going to treat it. After we got the system in, we started to drink the water. It kind of tasted bad. We found out that we had a lot of decayed vegetation-tannic acid-was in the water. We had to come up with a solution how to get that taste out of the water, because the chlorine and the tannic acid did not appreciate each other. It kind of messed the water up. That was the challenge we had at Cedar Flats, plus all the moisture and rain we had.

Over at Anaconda we had standard plans that were developed to be used service-wide, also at Trapper Creek. We had the same contractor working on the job on both camps. At Trapper Creek, we had no problems whatsoever with the county officials and others. They were anxious to have us have the Job Corps camp there, as these other locations were too. In Anaconda we had a unique problem there because of the strong labor unions in that area. As we were building the camps, we found out the electrical system just would not pass any codes. We asked the county to help us inspect all those parts of the buildings we were doing, like the sewage,

plumbing and electrical. The electrical inspector would not approve anything, even though Trapper Creek had no problems. We learned later that, after several meetings and conflicts, the county had requirements that all wiring had to be in conduit. That was primarily a labor issue. We were building to the national electric code, which did not require it. Most people may not realize that the Forest Service tries to comply with state and local laws on everything it does on the national forest, but it is a policy problem issue and not a law. We were trying to cooperate. We found out that the electrical wires and outlets would not be hooked up right, grounding wires were left off. The county electrical inspector had the ability to walk into a room and go up and take a plate off the outlet and find the wires not connected right. We did not understand that. It got so bad that the state electrical board finally had to come and have a meeting with the Forest Service and the county commissioners and the county electrical inspector to resolve the problem.

Prior to the meeting the electrical engineer for the region, the forest engineer, the contract administrator with the Forest Service, and I went through every building at Anaconda and checked every outlet, every switch in there. We found wires not connected. We hooked all those wires up and the next day we had our meeting. The state electrical board chairman asked what the problems were and the county electrical inspector said, "They don't do it right. They leave wires unhooked, things like that." He said, "Show me an example." We had marked on the plans every outlet that had not had the ground wires hooked up. This fellow had the ability to walk to every outlet that we knew we found wires unconnected that we had hooked up. As a result of the meeting the state electrical board chairman says, "I think the Forest Service is doing a fabulous job here. In addition to it, they are being very nice to us inviting us to come in and work with them when they do not have to. I think we had better just let the Forest Service do their job and the county leave things alone." We accomplished the job and now the Job Corps program is still going successfully as well as it is at Trapper Creek. It was an interesting thing at Anaconda. We later found out that the contractor had hired an electrical subcontractor from eastern Montana and not a local electrical contractor and that is where the problem apparently originated. But it was an interesting experience.

You have been involved in some organization changes and studies and development. Tell us about your involvement there.

In the mid-1960's and into the late 1960's, Neal Rahm was the regional forester in Region 1. We seemed to have a lot of distrust and non-communication between the regional office and the forest, and the forest to the districts. Neal had read material about organizational change and he proposed that the region go through an organizational development process where we would try to open communication with all levels of the organization in Region 1. We entered a very extensive program of organizational change. It started out by Neil Rahm having all the division directors go to organizational development training sessions outside of the Forest Service, which involved industry people. From there we moved back to the Region and we

entered quite a program involving about every employee in the region in an organizational development program where we would try to open communications and develop trust with each other to get our programs moving in this region. It was an interesting thing that happened. We spent a week doing special training of everyone from clerks and other employees at the district level through the district rangers, through the forest supervisor and all his staff, and all the staffs in the regional office. A lot of feelings were hurt, but a lot of trust and open communication became available. If people at the district level did not agree with what was coming from the regional office, they spoke up and said, "Hey, that's wrong." And changes started being made. It was interesting at the regional level how the trust between all the divisions started opening. We found out they were all trying to do the same job, but we had different ways of doing it. As we found out, we could work together and we could get things done. Interestingly, as we went through this process, we held training sessions out at the aerial fire depot as different people came in. I was one of the lucky ones who got to conduct some of the seminars. At some of those things we had teams where we all had the same information available to us to solve a problem, but we were to come up with a team solution. As we would work in those groups, we would notice how different ones would come together as a unit on one problem, but as they went to the next problem, they would fall completely apart. That would like of surprise them. Then they would just talk to each other and find out why did not you help solve the problem when you had the answer. By doing that, when the next problem was presented to them, they would be right up on top of coming up with the kind of answer that was the best answer for those problems. From my viewpoint at the regional level I thought it was one of the best programs that we undertook here in the region. I felt that we could talk to anyone inside the region at any level without having any feelings hurt and we would all work towards getting the job done. We were getting blasted hard in Region 1 with some of our practices with roads, our practices with some of our timber things that we did. Clear-cutting was getting challenged and we did not seem to understand why. I think it helped us listen better to the public and listen better to each other. I still think that Region 1 was better off, even today, by having gone through this organizational development that we did.

As my career with the Forest Service wound down, I was in the regional office in Region 4. When I went to Region 4 in 1972 Nixon was the President of the United States and we went through this organizational change in the federal government with ten standard regions: Region 4 in Ogden, Region 1 in Missoula, Region 3 in Albuquerque were all going to be eliminated. The first year in Region 4 (I was in Region 4) we were in the process of getting every person who had ability and performance, good hands placed in the right location. I felt that the region was going to be eliminated. After President Nixon had his problems, the region closure issue was over. The regions then had to re-develop. Region 4, at that time I think, lost at least one, maybe two, or even three years of real efficient management as the region tried to restructure itself for the future ahead. At the regional office in Ogden, we dropped from around 300 people to probably 200 people. I think it was a good thing it happened. I expect both Region 3 and Region

1 were also downsized significantly at the regional level during that time. The Region 4 experience, I think, was a good experience and I really liked it.

When I retired in 1981, I was not ready to go, but it was time to go. After I retired the first year I worked around my house. Then the next year I signed up with an organization, the American Arbitration Association, as an arbitrator on contracts. People who had contracts and got into disagreements would ask The Arbitration Association to resolve the issue. During my career in the Forest Service, I had served on five contract appeal boards at the Secretary Agriculture level. I thought I was qualified then to help in that. That was an interesting experience. It went on for about five years after I retired. Private industry and other government agencies that have contracts were no different than the Forest Service with its contractual problems: misunderstanding or plans, or conflicts between contractors and sub-contractors are the same.

I have enjoyed retirement. In 1984 my first wife died of cancer and then a year later I remarried. The lady I married was a good friend of my first wife, and her husband worked for the Forest Service and happened to be working for me. He was killed in a bicycle accident and so we just continued another forest-engineer relationship as we re-married. Now we travel in a motor home about six months of the year. We enjoy skiing. We are still trying to ski. In 2002 we will have the Winter Olympics in Ogden. We have volunteered to help with that. We have been volunteering at the Snow Basin Ski Area as ski naturalists. We guide people down the mountain, explain natural forest programs and resources, and relationship of ski areas between the developers and Forest Service and enjoying a good time meeting people from all over the world in that program. So, it has been an interesting experience. I have never regretted being an employee of the Forest Service. An outstanding career I have had.