James L. McConnell- Oral History, Tape No. 2
This tape was transcribed by James L. McConnell

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

**Elaine McConnell-** This is tape number two of an oral history interview of James L. McConnell. The interview took place on September 8th, 2005 at his home in Lilburn, GA. The interview was conducted by Elaine McConnell and is under the auspices of the Southern Forest Service Retirees Association.

**Jim McConnell-** OK, we left off on tape number 1 with me assigned to the Southeast River Basin Survey. Before I get into that, though, I would like to go back and pick up a couple of things. Two things, that I would like to get on there. I think it's worth breaking in and doing it.

One of them was, when I was a senior at LSU they took us out into the Atchafalaya River Basin where they were doing some railroad logging. At the time they said it would be the last of the railroad logging, at least in Louisiana. It was very, very interesting. Of course you went out on a little old rickety dick train. It was through the swamp and trains are heavy, especially when they come loaded with logs. What they had done, was taken the tupelo gum (*Nyssa sylvatica var. biflora* and *N. aquatica*) and the low value species that grew in the swamp and cut them into log lengths and made a bed for the railroad track to go on. They had crisscrossed the logs and then put the rails on the top layer, of course. The train went out, I think, it went out with the engine going first going and then it just backed up coming out of there all the way. They had all their equipment there, the skidders and all of that kind of stuff on the flat cars. They would have sawyers that would go out into the swamp and cut the tree, limb them up and then attach the skidder cables and then, just pull them in and load them onto the flat cars.

That was, of course, an all day trip. It took all day to get that train loaded. That was very interesting and I have asked several places, later, especially, people in the west why they didn't use railroad logging out there because it was used a lot in the South. It was used up the North Georgia mountains. The Cohutta Wilderness was logged by rail and nobody seems to know anything about it out west and that seems like a curiosity, in a way. It was a viable energy source to get logs moved all over the South until after the Second World War when you had bigger and better trucks that the railroad logging went out, all over, I guess. It wasn't pretty. You would look at some of the old

pictures of the railroad logging and you wondered about safety factors and suff like that but that wasn't their problem at the time. But they did get the job done in some very difficult places, some very difficult logging conditions with the railroad logging. Of course, the environmental concerns now would precede any kind of working with railroad logging. (Note-recently I have seen several references to railroad logging in the western U.S. Apparently it was not widely or heavily used as in the South)

The other thing that I wanted to mention was, I talked about John Beal and his training plan. He was my first Ranger and the training plan that he had set up for me. At the time, of course, a lot of it was just sitting there and reading the Forest Service Manual and Handbook. I don't know about other federal agencies but the Forest Service may be unique in having most of the procedures, almost everything that they do is written up on how to do it, what paper work it takes, what are the due dates, are there procedures that you have to follow? Are there laws that pertain to that particular activity? It's all in the Forest Service Manual and, of course, the Handbook is, actually, each functions job to tell how a particular job is done. Back when I started working, the numbering system was a lot different than it is now. For example, timber sales was called "S-sales" it was under S. OK, simple enough. P was under planning, I think. Fiscal and fiances were under F, or something. Now it's under a numbering system, timber is under 2400, I forget all the different numbers for different things. Personnel is, I think, is 6000 or something. Like a lot of other suff the manual and handbooks have grown to be voluminous but in those days there were not so many of them. There was, maybe, three feet on a shelf and that was, we thought, a lot. And sitting there and reading those things was not a lot of fun. But it was one of the things you had to do because the Ranger would give you a little test every now and then or ask you what you had learned or read about, things like that. The Forest Service Manual and Handbook is a part of the Forest Service and everybody has to deal with it in one manner or another. And it has changed, like a lot of things. The old system and the new system, I wanted to mention that.

Alright, now we're going to catch up and go to the Southeast East River Basin Survey. I have been working on the Catahoula District (Kistachie National Forest) and was told that they wanted somebody in Atlanta (GA) for a six month detail to work on this particular survey. And what the ----

**Elaine-** What year was that?

**Jim-** What year was that? It was August 1961 that I was transferred to what they called WWRM. Wildlife, Watersheds, & Range Management is what the WWRM stood for, at the time and that is a funny combination and we'll talk about that in just a minute. I was transferred into the Regional Office which, in a way, is particular for somebody like me, as young as I was in the Forest Service. There is not many of the field personnel that get to do anything like that. My job, they didn't want me hanging around the Regional Office much so I was out in the field, usually four days out of five and sometimes five days out of five and often two weeks at a time. It covered western North Carolina, western South Carolina, eastern Alabama, almost all of Georgia, the panhandle and little bit of the peninsula of Florida. What it was, the Corps of Engineers was daydreaming and we were under contract to them to do the survey. What they did was, they sat down and they took out their little red pencil and they drew areas on the maps that could be impounded to make lakes, or to put water in, for whatever the reason. Whether it be for flood control and there wasn't much of that in that area but for wildlife or recreation. It was kind of, this area will work so OK and they put a circle around it. We were to go out and visit all these areas and take some data and give them the timber values or give them an idea of what occupied that piece of ground. Most of them, of course, were around water courses, most of then were low and swampy. I was in the Okefenokee swamp (actually it is the Okefenokee National Wildlife Refuge and Management Area.) one time and took a couple of plots in there. They were not going to flood it, you know, that was a unique area, never the less, they had sent us in there to do that.

**Elaine-** You need to tell what the requirement were that you personally made you eligible for the job.

**Jim-** I guess that was, I was young, I had experience in doing things like this on the Mississippi River & Tributaries Study. (I was sweet, kind and loveable) I could pack everything I owned in my car. At the time that was a Nash Rambler station wagon that I had gotten when I got out of the Army and I was cheap. I could move on the spur of the moment, all it took was a little bit of paperwork and off you go. I didn't have to worry about children being in school or a pregnant wife or anything like that. And for six months, you know, how do you move a family for six months or how do you handle something like that?. I was almost ideal for that kind of a job. So

away I went to Atlanta.

When I got to Atlanta they were very nice to me there in the Regional Office. I rented a room with Mrs Laurent. Mrs Laurent worked in Fiscal. She had worked there for years and years and she lived on Penn Ave which is about four blocks east of the Regional Office. I could walk to work.

**Elaine-** At that time where was the Regional Office located?

**Jim-** At that time the Regional Office was located at the corner of Peachtree and 11th Street.

**Elaine-** Peachtree and 7th Street.

**Jim-** 7th Street, excuse me. That's right, 7th Street. And her house was right down the hill, turn right go about a block and a half and there I was. I think it was three blocks over and one block right. It didn't take long, fifteen minutes and I could be there. Except on cold, rainy mornings it was a long walk. I was there from August till February.

The job was interesting. Emma Lou Waldburn was the lady in the office who did all the computations. I worked directly under Dave Larson who worked for Cecil Clapp and Glen Thompson was the WWRM Director, at that time. It was kind of interesting but like a lot of surveys, it gets boring after awhile. Two things stick out in my mind other than boring a lot of trees and measuring a lot of trees, sampling a lot trees and trying to figure out what a lot trees were there in the winter time without leaves and things like that.

I was down in northern Florida one time and I drove down the road, stopped and got out and looked around and I said to myself, "What's going on here?" (From the bark) It looked like I was in a stand of cherry trees. And then I looked up and they were pine trees but they were spruce pine, (*Pinus glabra*) a whole stand of spruce pine. Which is most unusual. I had seen, maybe, one or two spruce pine before. In going to school, they had an arboreum, of course, with one or two in it is a species that grew in wet areas. But this stand, the trees were just beautiful. Big old things and I just stood there a marveled at them. I still have a couple of pictures, slides I took. You took slides at that time, of that stand of trees and, boy, was I impressed with that. I hope they never used that area to build any kind of an impoundment.

The other one was, down there somewhere in northern Florida there is a River Styx. Well, you know what the River Styx is? That's the one, I think, you cross when you go to hell or something. I went in that day and I discovered that the property was owned by a big timber

company. Of course, it was posted. Most of the time I can sneak in and out but since it was a pretty big area I said, "I'll be the day here and if I get caught it won't be very good." So, I drove around and I found their headquarters. went in and told them I was doing a survey for the government and just left it at that. Would it be alright if I went on their property? They said they could do better than that, they would send so and so with you to help. I thought that was alright, I have nothing to hide, really. We went out and took a couple of plots and he helped me measure a couple of the trees, a young man about my age. Along about lunch he said. "You know, those things look just like big lakes or something." I said, "Well, I don't know. They never told me anything about that." He was about to show me the door if they thought they were going to get their land impounded and taken away, confiscated or taken away from them. I got the plots I needed and left and thanked them very much and that worked out pretty good.

Jim Wells was another one of the guys taking plots. I was involved with Jim later and I'll tell you about that in a little bit. Let me talk a minute about WWRM. At that time range management, Glen Thompson had been sent in from the West, the Forest Service west and they were determined that cows could graze on all the neat grass and foliage that we raised here in the South. But they didn't realize that the stuff was really poor pickings for the cows. I never saw a woods cow in the South, and there were lots of them, but I never saw one that was fat. They can survive, that's about all there is to it. But, they were determined that, some how or other, we could raise cows as a resource on national forest lands down here. And it just didn't work out. And it caused a tremendous amount of trouble over the years. They finally gave up and there are still a few cows around but there are very few. They are usually corn fed, or something later on to fatten them up before they are sent to market. To the extent that they do it in the West it just was not viable here in the South. Like I said, it caused all kinds of dissension and trouble and this that and the other. I was never directly involved in it but some of the other people were and there were hard feelings left over the whole thing or both sides.

The other thing about the Southeast River Basin Survey, Dave Larson and I, when we first got started went down to Florida and, no it was South Georgia. It wasn't quite into Florida. That area is covered with huge plantations where they raise quail (*Colinus virginianus*) and the timber is very secondary.

**Ealine-** Down around Thomasville, (GA)?

**Jim-** Yes, down around Thomasville. We met with some people down there and they said, "Oh, you need to go see old man Stoddard." Well, it was Herbert Stoddard who wrote the book on quail management. Literally he did, he wrote the book and he is the one who figured out you need to burn a lot and stuff like that. They told us where he lived and Dave and I went down there and found the place. It was just a little old log cabin, almost out in the woods. Herbert Stoddard was there and, oh, he would just love to talk to us. It was an education. He was a very bright man, very smart. At the time he was stuffing a turkey (*Meleagris gallopavo*)for President Eisenhower. Stuffing, mounting it, doing the taxidermy thing on it which, I guess, was a hobby of his. He showed it to us but it didn't look like much at the time because he wasn't through with it. But yea, we got an education that day talking to him and he's famous in the South for his work on quail and other stuff also, mostly wildlife.

Now working in our office on another job all together was a fellow by the name of Al Fredrick. I could call Al a trouble maker in a way. Our office had been taken over by a young lady they had hired in there as the Regional Librarian. Al Fredrick said I needed to go in there and tell her that he didn't appreciate too much that she had taken his office. Well, she hadn't taken it, she had been assigned the space and Al had to do what he was told. Her name was Elaine Schaap and her father had been a Ranger in the Forest Service. He had retired. Anyway, she and I got pretty much involved with each other. She understood things in the Forest Service and I was gone a lot and things like that. Anyway, I don't remember when was we actually met and started going together. I went there in August, it was before the winter because I can remember ----

**Elaine-**It was probably the end of August.

**Jim-** It must have been something like that but by Christmas time we had become engaged and were married later in February, the 24th of February 1961 in the First Baptist Church of Atlanta. And it was a pretty big deal because it's not very often that, like I say in the Regional Office that there are people young enough to get married. Most of them have been married for many years. They have families and things. It was a big deal. It kinda overwhelmed both of us, I think at the time. (It should be noted here that growing up in the Forest Service is often not an easy life for children. Elaine said the only playmates she often had were the chickens and rabbits they raised.

She asked her father if he would get a forester for her to marry. He told her no, he would not so she went out and found one herself.) My cousin, Al Hamilton was my best man, Dave Larson who I was working for and Jim Wells both were ushers at the wedding. We went down to Florida on our honeymoon.

By February, yea, by February I had just about got the job done. They kept us in wonderland for several weeks. They said, "Oh we'll have a place for you, don't worry." In other words, a new job is what I'm talking about. I forget where they were but for at least three different weeks it was three different places. It got almost where we were holding our breath because there are places that are better than others in the Forest Service but I think all the ones they had picked out were pretty OK. By then I was in the stage that would be an Assistant Ranger somewhere. Anyway, they kept us guessing for several weeks. Finally, they said it would be to the Oxford Ranger District over in Mississippi. Well, that suited me because it was right next to Louisiana. I didn't know a whole lot about Mississippi, especially north Mississippi. We picked up and went over there the first week of March. We packed everything we owned, the wedding gifts and everything in that little Rambler and I was pulling a (U Haul) trailer with just everything. We got over there to Oxford, I date it March 5th, 1962.

What they had done was, recently, split the Holly Springs National Forest into two ranger districts. The northern half was still the old Holly Springs District and the southern half, there at the river was the Oxford District. What river was that, I forget now. (Note-the Tallahatchie River) Everything was new, or old depending upon what you call it because we didn't have anything. Tom Price was the Ranger. We had a Ranger Clerk and I forget the lady's name but she was a graduate of Old Miss (the University of Mississippi) law school and she was good. She could handle things and did. Young, efficient, her dad was a doctor there in town. Her dad rented us a house out on Williams Street, 304 Williams St. Which had been build after the Second World War for all the soldiers coming home, I guess. It was just a little boxy house, no insulation, hot in the summer and cold in the winter. It was just about what we needed (and the rent was cheap). It had two bedrooms, a living room, a bathroom and a kitchen.

Ben Atkinson was assigned as a forester, then later on Bernie Dickerson came in as another forester, JF (Junior Forester). Bernie was just getting started out of school. Bernie had a family

already. He and Jan, I think his wife was, had three kids, two or three anyway. Yea, we had a pretty good crew but we were doing a lot of stuff. We were trying to get the district set up, sorted out. All the paperwork and different things had been sent down from the old district. Fred Harris was the Ranger on the Holly Springs and Jim Short was the Assistant Ranger up there. They were a pair, Fred Harris and Jim Short.

While I was there we built a work center. One story about the work center, they poured the footing for the building. First of all they cleared a spot out on the highway (Miss State Hwy #30 to New Albany) and put a fence up. That protected everything, at least we had a fenced in area where we could park the trucks and the fire equipment and stuff like that even if it was out in the open, there for awhile. Then they started putting in a couple of buildings, water pump and well. And they poured the footing for the building, warehouse, where we were going to park stuff, it was just the floor. It was in the fall or winter. Anyway, all of a sudden they suspected it had froze after being poured and before it set up. They had, all the engineers at that time always poured a sample or whatever they called it over there on the side. It's just a tube of concrete about a foot and a half long and about 3 or 4 inches thick. One Friday the phone rang and it was the head engineer in Jackson where the Supervisor's Office was. They decided they needed that chunk of concrete and wanted us to get in the truck right then and bring it down. Like I said, Friday afternoon and who wants to drive to Jackson, which was probably 200 miles away, it was a fair distance (Note - and this was before the days of Interstate highways and it is right at 200 miles from Oxford to Jackson). And then have to drive back because as you know the Forest Service isn't much on overtime. This, certainly, was not an emergency but they thought it was. So we talked and I think the Ranger Clerk being smarter than a lot of us, she said, "Why don't you just put it on the airplane and ship it?" So we called the airport and, sure enough, there was a flight later that afternoon and Tom looked at me and said, "Take it on out there and ship it." I took it out there, I think all we did is put a tag on it, you don't have to wrap a chunk of concrete. I took it out there and we shipped it for probably $10 which at the time was a lot of money but it would have taken 3 or 4 times that amount to drive it to Jackson. I came back and called them on the phone told them it would be on flight so and so and if they wanted to get it that night it was out at the airport. It dead quite on their end of the telephone. What are you doing? "Getting you your concrete, what do you think we're doing?" "Oh", was the

answer. Never heard another word about it but it saved a trip to Jackson and I thought that was just hilarious because engineers like to push foresters around and Rangers, too, if they get a chance but in this case, we beat them to the punch. The concrete got there, and yea, it had frozen. They had to dig out part of what they had done and redo it. I remember that. It wasn't much, apparently, it was just one section that they had poured that day, then, it froze that night. I thought that was a funny story.

Living in Mississippi was a little bit different. Mississippi has always been, I guess, one of the poorest states in the nation. And like a lot of places they do things their own way. It was a dry state at that time. There was no liquor sold in it, except, that every county had a illegal-legal bootlegger. The one for Lafayette County, where Oxford is was Johnnie's Grocery. It was a mobile home. You walked in the door and there was about ten square feet were full of sardines, moon pies, soda crackers and stuff like that and a cooler ( for soda drinks) and other things. Then, if you looked OK (or they knew you) and weren't wearing a Forest Service uniform, or something like that, you gave them your order for a fifth of liquor and they disappeared into the back of the store, brought it up and gave it to you. It cost five dollars, almost everything in the place, and they didn't have a big selection was five dollars. On a Saturday afternoon it was right busy, you had to wait in line. The one or two times I happened by there, it was a Saturday afternoon, it was so busy they were just about throwing stuff out the door and getting the five dollar bills and that was the end of that. That was interesting, taxes, there wasn't any taxes or anything that I know about but it was your local bootlegger in action.

During that time, too, President Kennedy got several programs going to help poor people. That's one of the things that he did and was good at, as you know. One was called the APW Program, Accelerated Public Works Program. We went out and got people under the poverty line and that wasn't hard to do. All we did was put out the word and they started showing up. Many would not read, write or sign their names. And, we put them to work. When we did, we had a lot of timber stand improvement, TSI, work that could be done and we had a lot of tree planting that could be done. Between the two we had a crew of, probably, twenty men going almost the whole time I was there, at least during the winter time. Of course, we still had work under the federal laws of 180 days, I think, you could employee people without hiring them full time. It wasn't necessary

year round but the work concentrated mostly in the summer, spring and winter time. Then, we had a crew leader that was a retired army officer and I can't remember his name. He got control, he had been used to people about like. He had them all lined up and he had them right shouldering their tool and he had them doing all kind of stuff. In fact, he got so bad, that we had to talk to him about it. This really wasn't the army and we didn't want to loose these guys because of something like that and the point was, no matter what they did unless they couldn't work at all we had to work them, we had to pay them. That was the point of the game, of the program right then.

The other thing was, it kept me awfully busy because I had to keep work for these people, especially in the winter time with tree planing. I remember that several times the phone would ring and it would be somebody from the Supervisor's Office in Jackson, "Can you take another half million trees?" Well, that converted to probably, four or five hundred acres. (Note- At 8 X 8 feet spacing for the trees, it would be approximately 800 trees per acre or 625 acres) I forget, now, how many trees we were planing to the acre. I would just have to go out, get my aerial photographs and then go out and find areas that looked like it needed planting on the photo, check it out and see if it would work and then mark it on the ground and, then, call them back and say, "Yea, we can do it." You just couldn't say no, that wasn't the way it worked. We planted trees and I don't know if anybody ever found some of them. Certainly they got mapped and things like that whether or not they got released, I'll never know.

**Elaine-** Now was this on government land or private land?

**Jim-** No, this was all on national forest land.

**Elaine-** Was it part of the gullied land?

**Jim-** Some of it, but we didn't have much of that. That was all of a separate kind of a deal. We'll talk about that in just a minute. Another thing we did we worked on some of those gullies that were on Forest Service land. Lets talk about the YLT and things like that. Right there in Oxford was the headquarters for the YLT, Yazoo-Little Tallahatchie River Basin Project. It was run by Vic MacNaughton and what they did was, North Mississippi (19 counties) and a little bit of Tennessee I think, very little.

**Elaine-** I don't think it went into Tennessee.

**Jim-** Maybe it didn't. Right in that area, they had a peculiar soil in there. Most of the lands

along the Mississippi River Delta were river borne (soils) out of the Mississippi River. But somehow or other during ancient times a big wind came along deposited a bunch of wind borne soil in there. It was much finer and more erodible. It's called loess soil. L-o-e-s-s soil. It's wind borne soil and ended up in a delta area. It's unique. When people moved in and started farming them this went all to pieces and gullies appeared, gullies that would take up 80 acres or more in some cases. Some would be a 100 feet deep or more. The YLT had been set up to work on these areas and mostly what they did was plant trees. (Note- all on private land) They would put little water retarding structures in them. They would pile brush and it was all hand work. Nothing big and it had been going on for years. They planted trees. (Note-a total of over 739,000,000 during the years, 1948 to 1985) It was self perpetuating in a way because a lot of the trees wouldn't, couldn't, didn't live so they would replant them again. The little (water retarding structures) would get blown out two or three years. It think, about the time that we were there, they had decided that those gullies needed bulldozer work and that was pretty expensive. You would have to take those side walls and cut down the angle of repose where you could plant a tree and it would stay there. You couldn't plant it on one that went straight up. It got to be pretty expensive. That unit lasted for years and years (37 years) Finally they closed it down. It got to be pretty political in a way. Vic MacNaughton did a marvelous job of running it because it pumped money onto that area and kept a lot of people with something to eat for many years.

They would have project foresters in, usually, every county. The headquarters was there in Oxford. When we first went to Oxford they were scattered all over town in different places. Elaine worked in the Court House. I think that was where MacNaughton's office was. She worked there for the YLT. The Ranger's office was on the (court house square) but it was upstairs over a store of some kind. I can't remember what kind of store but you went up on long stairs to the second floor and you were, kinda, in a big attic. That was our office, we had two rooms. I don't know, for years and years to me a Ranger's office had two rooms. One for the Ranger and one for everyone else. But this one was big. MacNaughton had gotten the money and they build a nice office a, nice new office off the square a block and half, two blocks, brick, a parking lot. (Note-it was completed in summer of 1962. At the time, it was called the Adams Building and was located on South Ninth Street. The Oxford Eagle reported that both the Ranger's office and the YLT were

located on the second floor.) It was air-conditioned, it was really nice. The Ranger's office had the downstairs, I think, in the front. Then they had the rest, they had about four times, five times more space than we had but we did have a nice little office.

**Elaine-** Internal Revenue had an office there too.

**Jim-** OK, maybe it was some kind of a federal building. It was finished shortly after we got there. We moved everything in there and got it set up.

The two winters we were at Oxford it snowed at Christmas both times. One time it was a disaster almost. My mother was coming to spend Christmas with us and she was flying into Memphis. So I get in my car and I head up that way with three inches of snow predicted for the day and the further I went the more it snowed. By the time I got to Memphis it was snowing hard and deep. Just outside of the airport my car stopped beside the road and I couldn't get it started. I've thought about that many times since but I think if I would have stayed there and give it a little more time it may have started. Never-the-less I pile out of it and make my way almost to the airport, not quite. Of course, by then all the flights had been shut down. The phones were still working so I was calling Elaine, collect, every time I could get a chance. To make a long story short. I spent the night in Memphis. I walked over to a motel. They had a room. I don't think I slept a wink. The next morning I caught a taxi because my mother had been up just about all night. They had flown her to Birmingham, Alabama and had put her on a train an overnight train to Memphis. I went down to the train station, got her and then we took a train back down to Batesville, Mississippi, which was about 20 miles west of Oxford. The head technician there on the district met us, Cecil Gibson was kind enough to get out in his car and meet us over there and went back to Oxford. Of course, my car was still in up there in Memphis ------ (Note-it ended up being over 3 feet of snow)

End of Side A

Start of Side B

**Jim-** Another notable thing that happened while we were in Oxford was that President Kennedy backed James Meredith, who was an Air Force veteran from Kosciusko, Mississippi when he wanted to enter the University of Mississippi, Ole Miss there (in Oxford). (Note- James Meredith was black and, at that time blacks were just not allowed to attend many school in Mississippi). It resulted in a terrible battle. A fellow has written a book on it, "An American Insurrection, The

Battle of Oxford, Mississippi, 1962." By William Doyle. I bought a copy of it and read it and it was terrible. But we lived there during that, at the time.

Briefly, I'll just go through, not the whole thing because, like I said the book takes up two or three hundred pages on the over night battle. And it was a battle that took place there. All kind of people were involved. We had been there only about six months. We didn't know a lot of people around there or anything like that. We were pretty good friends with our next door neighbors and there were a few people in the Forest Service that we knew. Fortunately the federal people that lived in Oxford, except for the National Guard were not involved in this. But a lot of Federal Agents were brought in from other places. I mean people like Boarder Patrol, Bureau of Prisons, IRS Agents that were authorized to carry firearms, US Marshal Service and things like that were brought in. Meredith made several attempts to enter the University, just about on a daily or every other day basis all during the month of September and he was turned back time after time after time. The State of Mississippi, the Governor, the Lt. Governor, or somebody found some reason why he could not be entered, enrolled and go to school there. The young man was, like I said, an Air Force veteran. He had been enrolled in Jackson State, he had been in the Air Force and had taken courses. He was really smart. He had done a bunch of stuff. He had learned some Russian , so it wasn't like he was forcing something. He wanted to get in there for one year. Go to Ole Miss and get his degree and leave. That is all he wanted. But the State was having nothing to do with that. They did not want him to be the one that broke the color barrier. They didn't want anybody to break the color barrier. So, they stood their ground. Finally, (President) Kennedy and Governor, Ross Barnett ( Sr.) struck a deal and it fell through, is essentially what happened. But Meredith showed up at the University and then people started appearing from everywhere. A bunch of people who lived there, a bunch of students. They were outsiders, mostly, but not all. Who was the Ex-Speaker of the Senate? Trent Lott was a student, at the time and was involved.

**Elaine-** He was student body president. (Note-William Doyle said Lott refused to be interviewed for his book but he was the leader of Sigma Nu fraternity and tried to keep members of the fraternity safe from harm.)

**Jim-** I don't know that, but he was involved. He was never charged with anything, nobody much was. The Federal Marshals were badly outnumbered. They had a bunch of (Mississippi)

Highway Patrolmen there and early in the evening the Federal Marshals kinda panicked and stared firing tear gas. What they didn't realize that they were the only people there that were going to help them, if they got any help at that time, were the Highway Patrol. But the Highway Patrol did not appreciate being gassed so a lot of them just left. And in a way, you can't blame them. That left the Federal Marshals with very little protection. They asked several times if they could fire (their weapons. They were refused permission by the White House) They were getting shot at, there were all kinds of firearms around. Two people were killed there that night. One was a reporter and the other was an Oxford citizen. The Federal Marshals were badly outnumbered and just hung on all night long by the skin of their teeth. About one or two o'clock in the morning some (Mississippi) National Guard troops arrived, and they didn't even want to be there so they were not enthusiast but they, very bravely took their position and held it protecting the federal people). Later on some soldiers from Fort Brag, 82nd Airborne arrived. They were Military Policemen and they were tough. They arrived and that is about all that saved the day, really.

Where we got involved was later, when the battle was over. The army was sent in there, they didn't have any maps or anything but they had to have a place to stay (pitch a camp). They set up camp out on some private land and we got a call about a day or two later to go out there and get the army and move them onto national forest. So we did that. I remember going with Tom Price, the Ranger, and getting the army and showing them several sites and telling them the President doesn't want you on private land because he's going to have to start paying for that. And so we got them on government land. A nice little area and then, right away, they started wacking away, trying to remake it like the army does when setting up a camp. They were planning on staying that whole semester (And did, while James Meredith went to school). In a way it was kind of funny, the army not quite knowing where they were.

Several other things. The day after the battle. we didn't exactly know what had happened. The reporting from the campus, this was not the days of live TV coverage and things like that. There were some radio reports but that was about all there was. The day after the battle, Elaine and I were headed for work and ended up on the (Oxford) square about the time another (regular) army unit got there. People just attacked those big trucks with bricks, rocks, pieces of concrete, throwing sticks and stones at them and things like that. And I can't remember that day if I had my uniform on or not,

I usually wore it there in town. We got in the building and kind of regrouped and then got with Vic MacNaughton (Director of the Yazoo-Little Tallahatchie Project). There were a bunch of Forest Service vehicles, US Government cars, pick-up trucks and things like that parked in the parking lot. They were unprotected. You could just walk up to them and break the window, cut the tires or do anything. We got together and decided that we needed to get those cars out of town. I had mentioned earlier that we had built the work center compound and it had a big fence around it, and at that time, that is about all it had but at least it was fenced and it was kind of off the road and certainly out of Oxford. So we all get in a vehicle and I take my (private) car to come back in. We drove the vehicles all out there. My Nash Rambler wasn't that big so I was bringing three others back along with myself. We head back to Oxford after taking the (Forest Service) vehicles out to the work center and locking them up. Well, we got to a (military) check point. They were having nothing to do with four white men showing up there coming into Oxford. By that time the Military Police had pretty well gotten control of things and they didn't want a bunch of people coming in there and causing more trouble. So, we had to show identification to about everybody at the check point that we lived in Oxford. It did, it took us thirty minutes to through that check point and then on back into town and once we got in we were OK.

The other thing was, I remember, Ben Atkinson— it was the day for time reports (to get paid). We didn't know if the mail was going out that day or not. So, he took all our time reports and drove them to Jackson with the Supervisor's OK. I thought it was a brave thing to do on a day like that.

After that we were issued a pass by the military that we lived there and then, later on, they learned, they had check points that we would go through every day (often more than once). They knew Elaine better than me, but they would wave us through(without actually showing them the pass they had issued).

Even later, I guess it was a week or two weeks, Tom Price had been scheduled to do a training session over at Clemson University (South Carolina). Things had quieted down and he decided that he would go. I forget what it was all about, it was some kind of training so he took off to go over there. That made me the Acting Ranger for that week. Well, I was sitting there one day and the phone rang and it was the Supervisor's Office and they asked "Where is the Ranger?" I said

"He's not here." The response was, "Well, you'll have to do." I thought to myself – Uh-oh! It was Truman Price who was the Administrative Officer calling and saying, "Get your pencil and write this down. "Tomorrow morning there will be an airplane, military aircraft will land at the Oxford airport about 9 o'clock in the morning. You meet Major Rowe, R-O-W-E. He spelled it out. You meet Major Rowe and he'll give you a check for $15,000. You take that check down to the (Oxford) Chamber of Commerce and get the quit-claim deed for fifteen acres of land on the University of Mississippi campus." What had happened was, that the Southern Station had been in negotiations with the university and the city, I guess, for that fifteen acres but they didn't have the money and so they just had an option on it. And all of a sudden when the White House, or whoever, was in charge found out about it that money appeared. So they wanted that fifteen acres so the Army could move onto it, fifteen acres was big enough for what they needed, of course. They set up a camp on the campus for the soldiers that were going to accompany James Meredith back and forth the whole time he was there. They were prepared to stay and they did stay the whole time. I did that, didn't sleep a wink the night all night, I don't think. That's how we were involved in the "Battle of Oxford."

Thank goodness that was all it was because we had to live there, we couldn't leave when it was all over with. I don't think anybody around there was much concerned with what we did, or even knew about it. But it sure made the headlines at the time and like I said, there was a very interesting book written about it and it was terrible. (Note-sometime later the Southern Station build a research facility on the fifteen acres.)

While we were there too, we had a daughter (Sharon). She was born on August the 2nd, 1963. Dr Holly was the doctor. That, of course, was our first child and it's a wonder that children survive sometimes, I guess, but she was a very happy child. Elaine got busy, she didn't like the diapers that were available around there. This was before all the paper diapers, throw-aways and things like that. She bought some flannel cloth from somewhere and made her own diapers. The were supper big, super heavy and supper good.

**Elaine-**they were one yard square.

**Jim-** One yard square. She would get up early in the morning and wash or do it at night and it would be my job to get out before I went to work, you know the Forest Service is always the first

on at work, and hang diapers on the cloths line. We didn't have a (cloths) dryer, we hung them out on the cloths line, unless it was going to rain. Oh, I hated that job of getting out there, it was cold. Later on it was cold, not in August, but later on. Just the indigently of it all, if you know what I mean. It was funny. Fred Harris, was the Ranger up in Holly Springs. Another time, and I don't know why I was always filling in for Tom but I had to go to Jackson to some kind of a meeting down there. Fred Harris was going too and so he calls and says, "I'll ride with you." Which meant I had to drive. So he drove to Oxford and we drove south to Jackson. We rode down there and he was talking, I guess he had a grandchild with him or something like that but he had to do the same thing. He had to get out and hang out the diapers. Well, that just helped my feelings ever so much. I knew I wasn't the only one in the world that did that.

That same episode, going to a meeting in Jackson. This was the days when most of the business got done in the hotel rooms after hours at the poker game. If you didn't play poker you probably wouldn't advance very far in the Forest Service. Lord, those smoke filled rooms with all those cigars. I wonder how we all survived. It would be so thick in there you could hardly breathe. That was just the way it was, and you better be there. Those games usually lasted till midnight, anyway. So that meant there wasn't much sleep. But, on the way home, yea we played poker that night got up the next day and the meeting ended late and we had to drive back to Oxford and to Holly Springs that night. So, I was driving. There was a little town over there (Water Valley, Mississippi) just west (and south) of Oxford and it was dark and we were coming down through there and I was so tired. I think Fred Harris was asleep over in the passenger side. I don't know, I guess I ran a red light because all of a sudden a little blue light comes on back there and it was a policeman. He said, "You ran a red light." I said, "I didn't see any red light." Fred woke up and said, "No he didn't." Fred talked the guy out of a ticket or I would have been in trouble about getting a ticket in a Forest Service vehicle. That would have been bad. Fred did most of the talking and talked him out of it. I guess my eyes were just crossed, that late at night. Maybe it was a good thing he woke me up because the rest of the way in to Oxford, we were only about 30 miles out of Oxford, I was sure awake that last 30 miles. Fred saved my bacon that night because at ticket doesn't look good on your record (especially if you are driving a Forest Service vehicle).

We stayed in Oxford from March of 1962 until June of 1964. Then one day the Supervisor

called or I got a letter. I have a letter around her somewhere, I guess, that Ray Brandt the Supervisor in South Carolina had chosen me to be a tree improvement forester in Moncks Corner, South Carolina. Now, I don't know what all that "chosen" business meant because I didn't know anything about tree improvement. Anyway, away we went. (Note-Elaine being from South Carolina had a lot to do with our acceptance of the job) We picked up everything and moved to Moncks Corner. I guess it was one of the nicest places, well we liked it. We liked Moncks Corner. We liked Moncks Corner a lot better than we liked Oxford. Oxford just seemed to be one disaster after another. Of course, our child certainly wasn't a disaster or anything. I don't know, it just kept my heart, my blood pressure up the whole time we were there with some of the things that were going on.

We got to Moncks Corner and I said, "Well, what am I supposed to do?" Fortunately they had the program already started. They had a seed orchard site picked out, they had a technician there by the name of Oliver Buckles who, at the time, knew more about it I did, and probably still does. They had cleared off about 300 acres out there in the middle of Hell Hole Swamp, which wasn't really a swamp. It was still full of stumps, they had cut the trees, they had picked the area and cut the trees but the stumps were still there on at least a part of it. Our job was to get rid of those stumps get it all leveled up get it laid out and proceed from there. They had already started making grafts from the superior tree they had picked. Let me back up just a little bit. Tom Swofford had started the regional tree improvement program couple of years before. He had figured out the program, written it all up, we had a handbook so it was all laid up in there. In fact, it was laid out much further along than where we were. It was laid out to the future with crossing diagrams and all kinds of suff like that. The breeding of these trees when we got them and things like that. Right at that time we were getting the seed orchard site lined up, there were several of those. There was one over in Louisiana, there was one in south Mississippi at Ashe Nursery. The old Stuart Nursery in Louisiana had been picked for the site over there. There was one at Ashe Nursery, there was one in North Carolina in the mountains, there was one out in Arkansas and there was one in South Carolina and then later on we had one for sand pine in Florida. The sand pine originally was in Mississippi but it didn't work out. What we were doing, we had what they called species geographic locations. For example, loblolly pine (*Pinus taeda)* from South Carolina. Within that

area we were to find 50 of the straightest, best growing, best looking, disease free, tallest, the best trees. The best looking trees. We had a whole set of criteria that they had to go through. There was a system we were to follow and they got points for different things. My job was, initially, to approve these trees for the states of North Carolina, South Carolina, Alabama, Florida and Georgia. So I was on the road a lot doing that. Then Buckles was at the seed orchard, he had one or two helpers. He was getting the stumps removed and getting it smoothed out and laid out according to the plan. We had a nice little office out there on North Hampton Road. We were just leading the way with stuff, learning how to do a lot of things, grafting pine trees. Whoever heard of that but after these 50 trees were picked, our job was to get cuttings ( of branch tips) scions, they were called, off of these trees. And then graft them onto suitable rootstock and grow little seedlings with this new top in it. Like a lot of things you would have, possess all the genetic information it that would have in the original tree. You can do this with apples, roses, you do this with a lot of plants. With pine trees it was kind of unusual. So, we were learning how to do that especially when you get to certain things, loblolly pine wasn't too hard to graft, shortleaf (*P. echinata)* was a little bit harder, longleaf pine (*P. palustris)* was kind of hard. We were learning how to do a lot of these things as we went along. And so it was to me the most wonderful job because none of my bosses knew much of what we were doing. It was up to me to keep them informed. They knew that this was a program that had originated in the Regional Office and it had been backed, by not everybody, but 90 % of the people did back it.. In fact some of them were so enthused about it that it just made your heart glad.

We were riding the crest of things at that time in all of this. We hired an old, Ollie did, a black guy there, local in Moncks Corner. His name was Namen Harleston. Namen didn't know that he could do so many things. He had just been a worker, a cotton picker, if you will, something like that all his life. But he got a decent job with the Forest Service. He got decent pay, we got him on full time and we taught him to do all kinds of stuff. He was just a good worker, once you got him lined up and understanding what you wanted the job would get done. He learned how to graft these trees. I would go in the winter time, in the fall and winter and pick up the cuttings, bring them back and then we would put them in the refrigerator and then they would have to be grafted within the next week or two. Then we would get through those and I would got some more from somewhere or we would have them shipped. We didn't like the shipping business because, at the

time, we didn't have FedEx and all that kind of suff. Shipping was a whole lot more hazardous than it is now.

One of the things we started out was doing the tree climbing ourselves. Having tree climbing schools, getting climbing equipment, doing all kind of things like that. Well, Tom Swofford decided before very long, and he was correct, that we needed a handbook. A safety type thing on tree climbing. So he decided that Jim McConnell would do that, to write that thing. So, I did. I got information from tree climbing companies and we wrote a handbook. But about that time we figured out, after doing all that, that there were people around that we could hire to do the tree climbing and then we didn't have to worry about the liability and safety involved. We kept a few trained people on hand to do special jobs but it just wasn't worth the trouble under the federal system because tree climbing is hazardous and you have to do things a certain way. You have to have a certain kind of equipment, most of which is pretty expensive equipment and we were better off keeping some of the equipment because we had purchased it already but just having a few tree climbers and contracting the work. We had a fellow down there out of Charleston that would climb trees. We would go with him and show him which trees and he would climb up there and get the cuttings and then we would pick them up off the ground, package them all up and be on our way to the next tree. He did the climbing every day. One of the problems with tree climbing is that it is a skilled job and the more you do it the better you get. It's kinda like flying an airplane or something, I guess. We weren't into it but several weeks out of the year so we would have to spend a week getting people trained and tested and up to speed and all that kind of thing. Then two or three weeks later we wouldn't be doing it anymore for awhile. But these guys did it everyday and it worked out very well.

One of the other things is that it was an interesting job, like I said, we were plowing new ground. One of the first things that got me in trouble, not that I was in bad trouble but got me noticed, if you know what I mean. We had that 300 acres and down there when you clear 300 acres and plant grass on it and fertilize it the grass grows. I mean it really grows. And we were wanting to plant these little bitty trees in grass that was waist high, literally. So that meant the grass had to be mowed and this was just before the days of the chemical revolution in grass control with Roundup and things like that. So we were mowing and we had a 6 foot (bush hog) mower behind a little John

Deere tractor and Ollie and Namen, mostly Ollie would run that thing. It would take two weeks to mow that 300 acres with that little 6 ft. mower. In fact, it was so bad that when Ollie would come in to eat lunch I would have eaten already and I would just keep the thing going just so we could get another acre or two during the hour that he was eating lunch, just so we could get the job done in time to start over, almost. And so I went down to the Supervisor's Office one day trying to explain all this and I said, "I want one of those big bat wing mowers, like you see out on the highway that the highway department uses on the interstate highway." "You want what?" Was the reaction. And I said, "Yea, and our tractor's not big enough, we have to have a bigger tractor. If we're going to get the job done that's what it's going to take." And I think everybody realized it at the time. So by the next summer, we had the bat wing mower and tractor to pull it and the job would get done a quarter of the time that it would before and we were able to keep up with it. But that was just something the Forest Service had never thought about, using something that big and we had one of the biggest, before it was over with, one of the biggest John Deere tractors you could get, almost to do that job and a lot of other jobs out there on that 300 acres. (Note-Phil Newton was the Timber Management Assistant in the Supervisor's Office at the time. He was probably one the nicest people there ever was. Explain the problem to him and he would back you all the way. He was old time Forest Service but he backed the tree improvement program to the hilt.)

Another funny story, was that when we were doing the grafting, you would plan little seedlings in plastic pots, let them grow a little and graft them. Then you would make sure it was going to survive and the graft live. Then you would take it out of the plastic pot and plant it in the seed orchard. Well, the plastic pots started getting broke, they would get run over, some would tear. So we decided we needed something disposable, trying to use these things over and over is just a pain in the butt. We tried some, we had a big brain storming session, I guess one day and I don't know who suggested it but somebody suggested, it was probably Ollie Buckles. He said let's use the milk cartons. There was dairy in Moncks Corner, Gippy Dairy. We passed it everyday coming and going to work. He said he had seen a bunch of them stacked out there that had gotten dirty or otherwise unusable. I said, "You know, I bet they will even give them to us." So he went over there and they did, they gave him a bunch of them but not enough. We tried using those and they worked very well. They were paper, the were waxed (coated) and they would last one year and that

was all we wanted. They we would take them off and throw them away and for the new year just get a new one and do it over. It was so much better than the plastic pots in that case because we didn't have to worry about going through them and picking out the broken ones and all that kind of suff. We would just start over.

But the next year, of course, the dairy didn't have any discarded cartons. We went out there and asked if they had any discarded cartons and they said, "No, but we'll sell you some." And we figured out that for a penny apiece or a nickle apiece, I forget what the price was now, but we were much better off. So we sent in a purchase order (requisition) for like 5000 half gallon milk cartons. Well, when that got to (the Supervisor's Office in) Columbia phone rings. "Jim, what are you doing, what are you going to do with milk cartons." So we had to explain all that. " But we've never done that." "Well, OK, let's learn how to do it." After thirty minutes of pleading, explaining and all that. "Well, OK." and we got the purchase order approved and go down and get our milk cartons and things worked out pretty good. That happened so many times in that program because we always wanted to do things the best way and sometimes the best way and the cheapest way, and the milk cartons were actually cheaper than the plastic pots which you may or may not be able use again and all the labor involved with their use. Plastic pots just cost a lot because you had to clean them up, stack the up and take care of them for the next year. Later on, we had things like sausage casing when we were dong the breeding. The sausage casings were the best material to do a controlled cross in. You would take the pollen from one tree and put it on the female flowers of another tree and then put the sausage casing over it and it was clear, it was relatively cheap, you could make it any size (length) you wanted and, with a twist tie. (The sausage casing would protect the female flower from unwanted pollen). We were forever doing crazy things that other people in the Forest Service had no idea what we were up to, in a way. So we would have to explain it all. (Note- I had a mental lapse in telling the use for the milk cartons. They were not used so much for the loblolly seedlings to be grafted but for the longleaf seedlings that were transplanted from the milk cartons into long nursery type beds where we would grow then until they grew large enough to be grafted. Usually a year of two. Use of the milk cartons shortened the time frame considerably. )

Yea, I spent a lot of time going around approving superior trees in the different areas. A lot of time in North Carolina (on the Croatan and Uwharrie Nfs) on the coast. Oh dear, the Croatan,

I think every mosquito in the world goes through the Croatan. You just breathe them in and out, almost. It will drive you mad sometimes up there were so many of them. I made several trips up there. I went to Florida and did a lot with the sand pine down there. More stories about that later when we move the sand pine seed orchard. Just getting the program started was the big push there at first. It took several years to do that. I wrote the book on tree climbing and then Tom Swofford also tapped me to go into the Regional Office, several times to help him put together an economic analysis of the program. Like I said, almost everybody believed in it but one of the people that kept having funny questions was Paul Russell who was Tom's boss. Paul was the Regional Silviculturist at the time. Paul like to exert his authority in a way, so he kept a heavy foot on Tom and just would not accept stuff that Tom told him. He had to always have the figures. Well, that was OK in a way but a lot of times there just were no figures for some of this. So, I helped Tom Swofford put together his paper, whatever you want to call it, the economic analysis. And that thing was used for good many years by a lot of people to justify, not only our program, but others ones also.

OK apparently we are about out of tape. I'll just wind it up for now and we'll back to other things about the tree improvement program on the next tape. It's a good story and there is a lot of things I need to talk about, people I need to tell about.

End of side B

End of tape.