U.S. Department of Agriculture
Forest Service
Region Five History Project

Interview with:	**William ("Bill")Frost**
Interviewed by:	**Susana Luzier**
Location:	**Anderson, California**
Date:	**September 26, 2006**
Transcribed by:	**Mim Eisenberg/WordCraft; November 2006**
Corrected by:	**Susana Luzier**

SUSANA LUZIER: This interview is taking place in Anderson, California. Today's date is September 26th, and it's twelve twenty-five, almost twelve thirty, and we're at Bill Frost and his wife Jeannette's home.

Bill, I'd like to ask you, to begin with, what day you were born and where you were born.

WILLIAM FROST: I was born in Marcola, Oregon.

LUZIER: How do you spell that?

FROST: M-a-r-c-o-l-a.

LUZIER: Marcola. Okay.

FROST: Yes. On May the 21st, 1925.

LUZIER: Wow. Okay. And did you and your family live where you were born?

FROST: Up till the time I started school. I did the first grade in Marcola, in the grammar school in Marcola.

LUZIER: Then where'd you move?

FROST: Then we moved to California, to Yreka. That was in '33, I believe, and then I was raised there, went to school there and entered the service from there.

LUZIER: The Forest Service?

FROST: The military.

LUZIER: Oh, military. What military branch were you in?

FROST: United States Marine Corps.

LUZIER: Wow! No wonder you're so great.

FROST: [Chuckles softly.]

LUZIER: How many brothers and sisters did you have?

FROST: Four brothers and four sisters.

LUZIER: Where were you in that line?

FROST: Number three.

LUZIER: Number three, huh? So you went to school in Yreka. Where'd you go to high school, there too?

FROST: Yreka.

LUZIER: Did you go to college?

FROST: No.

LUZIER: Can you tell me a bit about where you met your wife and when you got married?

FROST: Oh, good Lord. I was in highway construction. The office of the people that I worked for—the main office was in Hayward, California, on Jackson Street, Clements Construction Company.

LUZIER: So you were down in Hayward.

FROST: Yes, I operated out of there. They'd take me in there for the winter, and then I'd ship out in the spring. We set up rock plants and hot plants and did highway construction in various places in the northern part of the state of California.

LUZIER: How old were you?

FROST: Oh, early twenties. My wife and I were married when I was twenty-six. I met her in Hayward. She came out from Kansas. Her folks migrated to California. I met her, and then I'd keep coming back to Hayward every time I had time off, and we'd get together and argue. [Both chuckle.] And then finally in 1951, over a Memorial Day holiday, the company had a job at Burney, and we had set up a crusher at Hatchet Mountain.

LUZIER: A crusher?

FROST: Yes, a rock crusher. And we'd crush the aggregate to the size that they used to make blacktop mix to surface the roadways. Anyway, we got married over a four-day holiday, and that's where we spent our honeymoon, was in Burney.

LUZIER: That little town.

FROST: Yes.

LUZIER: Wow. Oh, at Burney Falls. That's beautiful.

FROST: Oh, yes.

LUZIER: Yes.

FROST: A thirty-minute drive from Burney.

LUZIER: Yes. Yes. So I bet you've gone back there since, too.

FROST: Oh, many times. Many, many, many times.

LUZIER: How many children did you have?

FROST: Three, three boys. Bradley William, David Allen and Steven Leo.

LUZIER: Leo?

FROST: Leo, L-e-o. They're all about twenty months apart.

LUZIER: Sounds you like planned it.

FROST: Kinda.

LUZIER: [Laughs.] Do they live around here?

FROST: Yes. My middle son lives next door, and my oldest boy has a business here in Anderson, has for twenty-two, -three, -four years, and my youngest son works for the Redding Fire Department, and he's within probably three years of retirement.

LUZIER: Wow. And so what kind of business does your son have that's here in Anderson.

FROST: Anderson Athletic Club.

LUZIER: Oh. Oh, I remember you telling me about it. Huh

FROST: Pretty good-sized installation.

LUZIER: So what were *your* first jobs? Was this your first job, that rock crushing job?

FROST: No, no, no.

LUZIER: Well, tell me a little bit about—

FROST: I started out—in the process, while I was going to high school or grammar school, like most kids, raised in a rural area; most of my work was ranch work.

LUZIER: In Yreka?

FROST: In the outlying areas, in the valley there. But we—oh, good Lord, you're asking a guy to go back a long ways with a bad memory.

LUZIER: [Laughs.]

FROST: But ranch work, and that covered everything from pitching hay to milking cows by hand. That was my first job away from home, was working for an outfit by the name of Fiock, filling in behind a harvesting crew. It was a dollar and day and room and board. That was my first one.

LUZIER: How old do you think you were, approximately? Were you in high school still?

FROST: Oh, good Lord. I was fourteen probably.

LUZIER: Wow.

FROST: Thirteen, fourteen.

LUZIER: We all worked young in those days.

FROST: And then I was offered the opportunity—I was in high school—to work for [Blister Rust?], and I took that job, out of Hilt, California. I was on a blister rust crew. That's where I first learned to handle a brush hook, cleaning right-of-way and attacking blister rust.

LUZIER: Now, Blister Rust wasn't part of the Forest Service at that time, was it?

FROST: I think that was a special project, a special project, but we filled in as a fire crew. I was a number two man on a fire crew.

LUZIER: So that's really where you got your first—

FROST: Yes, we—

LUZIER: [cross-talk; unintelligible].

FROST: —slept with our pants around our boots.

LUZIER: I'll be darned.

FROST: That's right.

LUZIER: That's cute.

FROST: And then from Blister Rust I went to the Southern Pacific Railroad as a gandy dancer [slang term for workers who maintained railroads] on the same special program.

LUZIER: A gandy dancer.

FROST: That's right.

LUZIER: Was it that?

FROST: It was a section hand. You learned to drive spikes and handle the square point shovel and tamp ties and carry heavy iron. Operated out of Montague on that. A season and a half I put gandy dancing. And then when I went in the service, the war had already started, and I signed up just as soon as I was eighteen. My older brother was already in England, out with the Eighth out of England, and my dad wouldn't let me sign up at seventeen. So we discussed that several times. Anyway, I signed up as soon as I could, and they took me just as quick as—right on my birthday.

LUZIER: Do you remember what year that was? We could figure it out, '25 and eighteen, '43.

FROST: Forty-two.

LUZIER: Forty-two.

FROST: Forty-two I started the paperwork, and I went in August of '42 or '43, '43 I think it was. Yes, August of '43. Trained at San Diego and joined the 2nd Marine Division after they come [sic; came] off Tarawa.

LUZIER: What's the word you said, "Tarwa"?

FROST: Tarawa.

LUZIER: Can you spell it?

FROST: Ta-r-a-w-a, one of the biggest battles in the South Pacific.

LUZIER: I interrupted you when you were spelling it.

FROST: T-a-r-a-w-a.

LUZIER: Okay. The transcriber would want to know how to spell it.

FROST: Ah. Anyway, then from there, did five assault landings, three major campaigns, Saipan, Tinian, and Okinawa.

LUZIER: Were you a pilot there?

FROST: No. No, I was in combat intelligence, classification 636. And then after Okinawa we went into the home islands of Japan. *Kayusha* landed at Nagasaki, where the second A-bomb dropped. And then we did inventory of gun emplacements, personnel and were involved in the rehab of Japanese military and made sure that there was no remaining armament that could be used against us. And then they moved us out and replaced us with new people, specifically for monitoring the country. The attitude of the guys that had been in combat wasn't conducive to good public relations, so they moved us out as fast as they could.

Transferred all the high point men from the 2nd Division to the 5th and sent the Fifth back to the United States as an entire division. I got snagged at—Isahaia. Oh, what's the name of—some little town where they had us, where they were doing the transfer. But I ended up in the hospital for sixty-seven days, and the Fifth went back without me. I went home alone.

LUZIER: What were you in the hospital for?

FROST: Surgery on a condition I had. Another story.

LUZIER: We can skip it. [Laughs.]

FROST: Anyway, it was the 91st Field Hospital. It was the 92nd, went to the 91st and finally ended up the Navy took it over, the 118th Station.

LUZIER: What town was that?

FROST: That was in Sasebo [pronounced suh-SAY-boh], Japan

LUZIER: Seseiwa?

FROST: Sasebo.

LUZIER: Sasebo [pronouncing is SAH-see-boh]. Oh, I know what you're talking about. I didn't know how to pronounce it.

FROST: Whoever you talk to pronounce [sic; pronounces] it different [sic; differently].

LUZIER: Yes.

FROST: But they kicked me out of there—it was my first encounter in all the time I was in the South Pacific with white women. They were nurses in the hospital. And they had a doctor—oh, he's probably gone by now, but his name was Gaisford. He was from Pennsylvania, Chicora, Pennsylvania. Anyway, they shipped me out of there. I come [sic; came] back to the States on the U.S.S. *Brookings*. Landed at Seattle. Then they shipped me by rail from Seattle to Mare Island for discharge. I came home from there. Anyway, then I went into lumber, working in a sawmill.

LUZIER: What town was that?

FROST: That was back in Yreka. I ended up as pond monkey, pond sawyer, choker setter, turn-down man on the deck, tail sawyer, and then went from there into highway construction.

LUZIER: Just kind of tried everything.

FROST: Well, I realized that lumber wasn't where I wanted to spend the rest of my life, so I got into highway construction. Longer hours, better money, and in those days there wasn't much money around. It was real scarce.

Do you want to stop that just a second?

LUZIER: Got it.

FROST: Be right back.

LUZIER: Okay. [Tape continues to run from ET 14:02 to 14:24, then stops.]

[G.I. Bill educational opportunity]

FROST: Look at the offers they've got on the back. Read that where you can.

LUZIER: "Under 90 days and disabled. School time allowed: one year. Educational opportunities. Six months, one-and-a-half years school time allowed." Now, how did they do that? I'm not sure I understand what that all means.

FROST: If you spent three years in the service or more, you were entitled to four years' education by the government, paid for by the government.

LUZIER: Oh, that's how that worked. Okay, yes.

FROST: Now, that's where most of the guys who went through rehab—and they educated them, and they went into engineering. They went into almost any field that they were interested in. That's where I got into flying, was on the G.I. Bill. In 1948 I signed up for a pilot's license and went through the training at Siskiyou Airways at Montague, California. But then after that, it was just a series of going back to school, back to school for instrument rating, back to school for flight instructor training, back to school for commercial. While I was playing around in construction work, I was building up flight time.

LUZIER: [Apparently moves microphone closer to Mr. Frost.] I want to make sure she[the transcriber] can hear you.

FROST: I was building up flight time, accumulating flight time and experience. Different aircraft, different ratings, different things. When I left [the] Forest Service, retired [from the] Forest Service, I was airline transport pilot certificated and helicopter rated commercially, had all the rest of the ratings from commercial to instructor, right on through. Most of that was paid for by the Service, the Forest Service.

LUZIER: Forest Service.

FROST: Yes.

LUZIER: But you started with going to—

FROST: G.I. school in Montague in 1948, yes.

LUZIER: Wow. So you didn't really do seasonal work; you just started out being—

FROST: When I went to work for Forest Service—[Chuckles.] My encounter with fire while growing up—I beat wet grass fires with gunny sacks [sic; beat grass fires with wet gunny sacks]. As kids we were always standing close enough, we'd get recruited. I was thirteen, fourteen, fifteen when we'd end up on a fire someplace, chasing grass fires with a wet gunny sack. But that's another story.

LUZIER: Well, that's a good part of it.

FROST: Yes.

LUZIER: That's a good part of it. Did you get paid?

FROST: In those days, I don't think we did. We might have had a lunch or two and maybe have gotten fed once or twice.

LUZIER: That's interesting.

FROST: We weren't on the payroll. We were just kids.

LUZIER: I'd be kind of skipping, but maybe I should do this. How did the air tankers and the lead plane pilots evolve into firefighting? You probably remember those days.

FROST: Remember 'em! Remember 'em! I helped build 'em.

LUZIER: Yes.

FROST: I've got that entire story for you in a folder, in a binder: where the idea came from, how it was discussed on the Mendocino [National Forest] and how Vance Nolta and Brothers rigged a tanker to fly and demonstrated the fact that they *could* put retardant on a fire, and it all evolved from that, every bit of it.

LUZIER: So I'll be able to make a copy of that?

FROST: Oh, yes. I'll give you the whole [unintelligible].

LUZIER: Oh, that's great.

FROST: And that ties in with this study that I was telling you about, the basic study on retardant drops at Willows: names, dates, places, the whole cockeyed thing.

LUZIER: And it's all right there in that report.

FROST: That all comes through the same [unintelligible] sequence.

LUZIER: That'll be real interesting, I'm sure.

FROST: I can give you names from memory for most of the pilots that flew in 1955, the squadron [unintelligible] called it. And Hendrickson's son is still operating off the Willows airport. I should stop by and see him someday.

LUZIER: Yes, you're not that far from it.

FROST: But there was Sherwood, Lee Sherwood, Mushahad, Ray Varney, McCurley, and there was a guy—remembering names is bad for me.

LUZIER: Well, you've done really well already.

FROST: He was later on involved in an accident on a little airport on the east side of Lake Tahoe. He was on top of an airplane or an airplane landed on top of him. I'll think of his name here in a minute. Anyway,—ah!

LUZIER: Anyway, the model program began in Mendocino, not the Trinity? [Telephone rings.]

FROST: In Willows.

LUZIER: Now it [unintelligible].

FROST: The first organized study was performed at Willows, but when I flew contract [unintelligible] the first year for [Charles] "Charlie" Jensen, he had a sign: First in Forestry. I've got a picture that he sent me that dates clear back, and he claims it was a water dropping

operation off an old "Jenny" [Curtiss JN-4 aircraft]. So from the field, you get people arguing about who in the world was first, but to my knowledge, this study, this summary that I've got is the first organized study performed according to a program in the tanker business.

LUZIER: And how they were going to fight fire with it.

FROST: They took patterns, sizes, [unintelligible], gate openings, timings—they timed it. I've got pictures of a lot of that stuff. Stearman [PT-17] dropping, single tank, single drop

LUZIER: What kind of dropping?

FROST: Stearman dropping retardant. And I've got a picture of two of them in formation dropping. They've got all the rates of burn, the fuel, everything in this summary. But my experience in the tanker business started in 1957. We had an airplane at Montague. It belonged Charlie Jensen. It had been rebuilt for retardant. Now, this was two years after the Willows study. We flew that for a percentage, and kept chiseling time in it. My first season flying tanker was for four dollars an hour. But that was backed by a monthly wage from the company, too. Anyway, we flew on any smoke: California Division of Forestry, private, state, federal. Didn't make any difference. When somebody reported a fire, they launched us.

Now, in those days we weren't sitting around an airport. I was holding down a job and they'd get a hold of me and then I'd head for the airport and jump in the airplane, take my dispatch instructions from somebody standing right there, and head out and fly. That was before radios. No radios. I didn't like being out of communication. There were too many gray areas for a guy that didn't understand fire in those days. So I ended up putting a backpack underneath the seat of the airplane, with an antenna where I could talk to everybody on the forest, and I flew that way until the [Airnet?] radio came out. And then I kept that backpack under the seat every year we'd bring that airplane up there, or two of them, whichever the case happened to be. I'd

put a backpack under mine and then put the Airnet up behind the seat. All you had to do was just change the antenna, and I could talk to guys on the ground or I could take a position in air operation, take instructions from that. Worked out real well.

LUZIER: Kind of like being a dispatcher. You have to have all the nets coming in there.

FROST: Yes, the more information you go to a fire equipped with, the better off [sic; better] you can handle it or work at handling it. I used to—way back in the beginning—

LUZIER: And what year are you thinking about? Like, '55?

FROST: Fifty-seven. Yes, I didn't get in on the research work in '55. That was all done with that bunch of fellows I was just telling you about. Flew tanker from '57 to '62. That's the open cockpit type. My first flight was with a leather helmet, and my first helmet, hardhat that I flew with was from Hank Jori.

LUZIER: Oh, I remember him.

FROST: Yes, Hank had come up to do inspections, and he asked me one time what I was using. I told him. And he had an old surplus military hardhat. He gave that to me. I've still got it.

LUZIER: [Chuckles.] Wonderful, wonderful.

FROST: So anyway, for years I had the opportunity when I worked for Forest Service—

LUZIER: Now, were you stationed at the service center, Northern California Service Center?

FROST: After I went to work for Forest Service.

LUZIER: Yes. Fifty-seven?

FROST: I had the opportunity—I went to work for Forest Service in 1962.

LUZIER: Oh, not till then?

FROST: No, it was 1962.

LUZIER: You weren't working for them when we were out there at the service center?

FROST: Oh, yes.

LUZIER: In ’59? Oh, let’s see. No, that would have been—I was out there in ’73—’67.

FROST: I came to the service center. They hired me, and I flew down here and talked to Hank about going to work for the government, and he put me on the payroll right then, and then he sent me back to Montague, and that was my duty station for the next summer with a Lead plane.

LUZIER: And what year do you say that was?

FROST: That was ’62.

LUZIER: Sixty-two.

FROST: And he sent me back up there with a T-34 [Beechcraft T-34 Mentor], ended up with a B-17 and two F7Fs [Grumman F7F Tigercat] based at Montague base, and we flew all our fire assignments from there. Then I moved to Redding in ’63 and left the family at Montague, and for six months they put me in the cookhouse. I lived there in the cookhouse.

LUZIER: Out at the service center?

FROST: At the service center. And that was my official duty station from there until the time I retired. NCSC, not the cookhouse.

LUZIER: When did you move your family down?

FROST: Sixty-three.

LUZIER: Sixty-three.

FROST: Yes.

LUZIER: Did you live here, in Anderson?

FROST: No, we were living in Montague.

LUZIER: I know, but I mean from Montague that you moved.

FROST: Moved down here from Montague, yes.

LUZIER: Yes.

FROST: Yes. Yes, we were buying a home, a nice place in Montague. Rebuilt two F7Fs as an operator, 135 certificated operator. And we flew three N3Ns [Naval Aircraft Factory N3N trainer] or Stearman and two N3Ns, the TBM and an F7F.

LUZIER: And you just mostly dropped.

FROST: Beg your pardon?

LUZIER: Retardant.

FROST: Yes.

LUZIER: Yes.

FROST: Yes, they were a single-source airplane. Once you put a tank in them and then rig them for retardant—

LUZIER: I remember that we had to know where the fire was and have a cross, you know, within four minutes. Now, how long did it take for the plane to get rolling and stuff?

FROST: Off the ground in less than ten minutes.

LUZIER: That's what I was thinking.

FROST: Then whatever the travel time was to the fire.

LUZIER: Yes. And you didn't just do—you took men and equipment, too. Did you do the smokejumpers?

FROST: Oh, yes.

LUZIER: Fly in smokejumpers? That's what I thought.

FROST: After I came to work for Forest Service in '62, they kept checking me out in whatever they had, and I flew everything that the Forest Service had, and I did whatever work was necessary to do with airplanes. When there was a fire, we flew lead plane. And when there was

smokejumpers to be dropped, we dropped jumpers. And when there was para-cargo to do, we had para-cargo work. And with the [Douglas] DC-3, and in the C-46 [Curtiss C-46 Commando] we did personnel transport. And we had some jumping out of the C-46, but that was kind of overkill. It was a big airplane. We didn't need that many jumpers. Usually we were chasing lightning strikes.

LUZIER: At any time, there were two planes up, I know you were lead plane, weren't you? Wasn't it anytime there were two planes you had to have a lead plane?

FROST: They did several things, Sue. Dispatching—I never did envy "Sid" Nobles his job. To dispatch airplanes, there's a variable built in there by weather and wind and so many changes that you can't look at a piece of paper and say, "Yes, I have this and can ship you this and it can be there at such-and-such a time." It was like it was always throwing him a variable. He didn't really have positive control. And a lot of the guys were hesitant—in my mind, there was never any doubt. I was just another tool in the shed, to service line, and was dispatched through North Zone Service Center, through their dispatch function, and in all the time I worked for Forest Service, I belonged to service, I belonged to dispatch at North Zone. I went where they sent me and did what I was told to do, and I had no problems with that, none whatsoever. But the workload that Sid's had—I've got a letter in there that really brings it to light, the workloads that kid had. But it was not only him. There were other people that he hired when the workload got too heavy, but there was [William] "Bill" Dale and—oh, good Lord, who else?

LUZIER: A lot of them went through there, probably.

FROST: Yes.

LUZIER: Well, you really saw a lot. I'm trying to think what the next best question would be.

FROST: I flew smokejumpers in the 300-Series Otter [De Havilland Canada DHC-6 Twin Otter] out of Silver City, New Mexico; Grangeville [Idaho], Missoula [Montana], Boise and McCall, Idaho, almost every jumper base that we had. I really, really enjoyed working with those kids. They have so much hidden talent.

LUZIER: Yes.

FROST: It's a shame—you know, they come in there and they go to work, and the best thing to do is keep your head down and your hip pockets up and keep your mouth shut, but there's talent galore.

LUZIER: Some of those people went right on up, too, because of people like you—

FROST: Oh, hey.

LUZIER: They recognized their abilities, and they knew they could do it. You know, gave them self-esteem when they were young.

FROST: There was a kid in smokejumpers that kept all their saws tuned up. He was like a brain surgeon. I don't think I've ever heard a story of anybody that ever pulled on a chainsaw and it didn't start. He was good. One of the kids was an artist. He's gone on in private life in that world.

LUZIER: Do you remember their names?

FROST: I can dig them out for you.

LUZIER: That's all right. I just thought you might—

FROST: See, I've got smokejumper pictures, group pictures with names of all the guys through the years.

LUZIER: Charlie gave me a whole bunch of those, [Charles E.] "Charlie" Caldwell.

FROST: Pictures?

LUZIER: Yes.

FROST: Did he?

LUZIER: Yes.

FROST: Okay. Well, see, he was picking them up the same place I was.

LUZIER: Yes.

FROST: Every year they'd have a group picture. The pilots would end up with a group picture. Then I've got a bunch of pictures of pilots—God, I've gone to instrument school, on every refresher instrument school they had around this country, from Napa to Portland to Salt Lake City, Ogden, Utah. Operated most as a student doing refresher work and as an instructor.

LUZIER: I remember you being in some of the pictures.

FROST: Yes. I've got stacks of that stuff around. Went to USC for accident investigation school.

LUZIER: Now, what's USC? Because they won't know what that is.

FROST: University of Southern California.

LUZIER: Okay.

FROST: Yes. Its accident investigation school. The onsite location was the only bad thing about accident investigation. It gets to be pretty messy.

LUZIER: Can you explain that just a little bit?

FROST: Well, you could end up, here again, through dispatch—I'd get a call from Sid, and he'd say, "CDF [California Division of Forestry] has had an accident over in [Brandsteader Lane?], and they want you to assist in the investigation." I'd grab an airplane and go straight to Ukiah, tie in with the investigating crew there, and then we'd go to the site by whatever means available. We've been into the High Sierras in helicopters, and we've walked in, and we'd do

ground sketches and positions, write up a summary and do the ground work there, and then we'd bring it back and then we'd go clear into engine tear-down with the National Transportation Safety Board. But there's nothing sanitary about a crash loaded with retardant or people or any—and that's more stories. I was involved with a lot of that.

LUZIER: You've kind of talked about how you worked on other forests and you got called everywhere, but were you based out of Northern California Service Center?

FROST: That was my base.

LUZIER: Yes, okay, so it sounds like you were gone a lot from home.

FROST: Never over three weeks at one time.

LUZIER: Three weeks is a long time.

FROST: [Chuckles.]

LUZIER: Yes.

FROST: I did one stretch in Silver City, New Mexico, that took just a little bit under two weeks, and then they'd ship us to Winslow, Arizona. You got caught there several times, fighting fire on the Apache [National Forest].

LUZIER: Upache?

FROST: What?

LUZIER: Did you say Upache?

FROST: No, the Apache National Forest.

LUZIER: Oh, Apache National—okay.

FROST: Yes.

LUZIER: And so it sounds like you enjoyed your career with the Forest Service.

FROST: I did. But I wouldn't tell anybody that.

LUZIER: [Laughs.]

FROST: There's [sic; There are] so many spin-offs. I've met so many people that I've worked with and for that are really outstanding. You mentioned [Douglas] "Doug" Leisz here a while ago. We went to this ranger district meeting. We were coming out the next to the airport, early-morning departure out of Cave Junction, and Doug was riding in the front seat, and he's a perceptive person. And he said, "That meeting was a little big different than what you've been to in the past, Bill." I said, "Boy, was it!" He said it was noticeable. I never said a word. But he could tell that it put me in shock.

LUZIER: What kind of things were happening, Bill?

FROST: It was just a straight-and-out unruly, dissatisfied, grumbling situation.

LUZIER: Knew how to put it in perspective.

FROST: He did a beautiful job.

LUZIER: Get everybody back on track.

FROST: That's right.

LUZIER: Yes.

FROST: Now, traveling with him—he never left you sitting someplace by yourself to hook up with you later. We traveled together everyplace we went. They had arrangements made for me just like they did him, and I went to his meetings and was always taken care of. He saw to it, whereas in the years before his arrival in this region, you were just a piece of equipment. You did your own arranging, your own fueling, your own motels, your own meals, everything.

LUZIER: You really appreciate people like that.

FROST: Oh, man, I could sit here and brag on him all day long.

LUZIER: Well, let's see. I've got a question here that says: What was the workforce like when you started with the Forest Service and later as this role progressed? For instance, did you devise changes over the years in *your* role as pilot? Tell me what your title was, and kind of elaborate on that.

FROST: To start out with, the Forest Service has been severely handicapped from the very, very beginning, and the main problem has been lack of money. I can remember every situation, every project or anything that I got close to that had to be done or somebody was trying to do, there was a fight to get the money to get it done. That was everything up to and including reseeding, forestation, reforestation, everything. The most valuable person on the forest, forest level right on up through, is the administrative officer. He always knew where some project had finished ahead of time, and he could save a few dollars, and he kept that in a fund. And when the regional forester would go to him—not the regional forester but the district ranger would go to him, he'd say, "Have we got money to fix this bridge?" And he'd say, "I'll let you know." And then in the next couple of days somebody would be working on the bridge. That was all done very discreetly probably and all very legal, but the administrative officer kept his hands on the money in the Forest Service.

LUZIER: [unintelligible].

FROST: I can remember when Doug Leisz came to this region. We took a trip through every forest.

LUZIER: I want to make sure your hands aren't in front of this mike, Bill.

FROST: We went to every forest, and money had become available to hire extra crews, and he had a staff meeting on every forest, fire control staff, and he pleaded with them, "Fellows,

whatever you do," he said, "be careful how we handle this money or we'll kill the goose that laid the golden egg."

LUZIER: You know, everybody talks about this, how CDF always spends money—you know, lots of money, but Forest Service was pretty stingy.

FROST: They were tight.

LUZIER: [Laughs.]

FROST: They were really tight. And they handled their people that way, too. They handled their people that way, not because they were vicious or mean or ornery.

LUZIER: There just wasn't the money.

FROST: They were forced into doing the things that they did to conserve money. For the first few years I was aboard the Forest Service, per diem was down to eight dollars, eight dollars. We'd sleep as many as three of us in one room to survive on that. I can remember it building and going up, and I can remember all kinds of arguments and discussions about more money, more money and more money.

LUZIER: Now, fire time was just straight time, too. I remember that. When did that go—

FROST: They bounced back and forth on that. Sometimes—they finally got into time-and-a-half over—

LUZIER: Certain hours.

FROST: —certain hours, but that was based on the amount of money the regional forester made, and you couldn't exceed his salary, and you had to take comp time if you got up—I had one of the pilots tell me the other day that this year has been a really busy year for him. He's got over 600 hours of overtime.

LUZIER: Wow. And it's not just straight time anymore.

FROST: Not anymore.

LUZIER: Gosh, it would be beautiful to work now.

FROST: Oh, yes.

LUZIER: In fire.

FROST: See, I can remember when we had discussions with administration over per diem. I think I told you something about this the other day.

LUZIER: Do you remember any of the names of the people that were in administration?

FROST: [William] "Bill" Donahue.

LUZIER: Yes, I remember that.

FROST: Yes. But they've straightened that all out in Bill Donahue's time. When we would leave ten minutes into a new quarter [chuckles], we didn't get that quarter. It started at the next quarter. It was just a—

LUZIER: A way of pinching pennies.

FROST: Well, yes, I guess. But as time progressed, slowly that changed. I can remember when they made all the pilots GS-12. That was done on a comparable basis, and that was being fought at levels way above the field levels. I can remember the throes that Bud went through, because he had come up through the ranks.

LUZIER: Bud Pettigrew?

FROST: That's right. And he'd worked hard to get where he was. And I think at that time he was either an -11 or a -12; I don't remember. But that lent a lot of status to that position, the fact that he'd gotten there that way. But I thought he was going to have—he had some severe problems with adjusting to that, I think. But, oh, I could tell you stories maybe that would—

LUZIER: Frost my hair.

FROST: Curl your hair.

LUZIER: [Laughs.] I need some more in the back.

FROST: [Chuckles.] But it's been a good outfit. There's [sic; There have] been a lot of people that have gotten a start there and a lot of people who've stayed with it and gone through it and retired. Right now I'm the most independent thing in the world

LUZIER: You're the most what?

FROST: Independent thing in the world. That and Social Security, and it's from an outfit that—I don't see it going bankrupt, not like you're wiping these kids out on their 401(k)s and their other—

LUZIER: Yes.

FROST: My son next door took a $7,000 loss from the company he worked for when they went bankrupt, and he worked round the clock at times. Vacation pay and everything was wiped clean.

LUZIER: Wow.

FROST: Yes. That don't [sic; doesn't] happen with the government.

LUZIER: We lived at the right time and worked at the right outfit.

FROST: Yes, and all in all, I worked with, like I say, some of the best people that ever came down the pike. Really I've got no complaints.

LUZIER: Do you feel that the current technology and communication has affected the way your job would be done now?

FROST: Oh, certainly. I've had to break off in the past with a tanker for a drop on the fire because you'd meet somebody coming head on and didn't have a radio to talk to him.

LUZIER: Oh!

FROST: That's right. You had to do your own separation, your own priority, your own time to drop. [Chuckles.]

LUZIER: Your own looking around.

FROST: Oh, yes. So radio has gone—oh, when I left Forest Service, we had 5,700 channels that I could talk on.

LUZIER: My God!

FROST: Fifty-seven hundred.

LUZIER: [Laughs.] Wow.

FROST: I've got a stack—well, I have spent a lot of my time wanting to be totally independent and then have the latitude of doing a good job. I accumulated frequencies, and at one time in my flight bag, if I rolled in on an initial attack fire and you saw a car leaving the area fast, I could pick up a microphone, and I could call the sheriff's department in the town right ahead of him and have a roadblock set up to talk to that man when he got there.

LUZIER: Wow. I [cross-talk; unintelligible]. [Laughs.]

FROST: We had that capability. CDF had numbers painted on the top of their cars. If we rolled in on a fire and you saw a blind spot that he couldn't see and it was going to flank him or outrun him or something, you could dial up his car number—take a little time to do it—and call him and talk to him. I think I had a frequency I could open floodgates in [Waxahachie?], Mississippi, I think.

LUZIER: I remember we had at least two radios we talked on in Shasta-Trinity and then two that we monitored. We had to be paying attention—and then the telephone too.

FROST: That's right.

LUZIER: Yes.

FROST: Yes.

LUZIER: All the time.

FROST: It didn't take long to realize the weak spots and where safety was at stake, and there were two things that were pushing this early tanker business constantly. Money was one, and safety was the other, constantly safety, safety, safety. And we set up techniques, put a system together by furnishing military FAA with each geographical location of evry heliport throughout the region. Ash Creek Butte out of McCloud had a heliport there in the summertime, and we could have a military jet go through the gates at Ukiah in three and a half minutes. A low-level burner route could be right over Ash Creek Butte with the potential of a helicopter lifting up into its flight path.

LUZIER: Wow.

FROST: That's three and a half minutes. That's not much notification time.

LUZIER: No.

FROST: We had that potential all over the region. We ended up getting so sophisticated with that process, we made contact with military, FAA [Federal Aviation Administration] people, and we had telephone numbers of whom to contact, and that information was all given to the Zone Dispatch and then held in control through, here again, the service center, Sid Nobles' position. If we had a helicopter come While returning from Weaverville I had a military jet pass beneath me one afternoon in a T-34, and he went right across Whiskeytown Lake, headed right for the dam and departed northeast. I didn't know his type. I got his color, his shape and a couple of numbers, called dispatch, and dispatch picked up his phone, called the FAA that covers this district (military FAA) and they met the jet pilot when he taxied in at Reno and told him where he had been and what he'd done and what he wasn't to do again. So when you say, "Have things

changed?" Yes, they sure have. But it's been a hard process that I'd like to think they are continuing to improve on.

LUZIER: Did you by any chance go to that film at Cascade Theater here a few months ago, where the pilot flew by himself and did all these military secrets and looked in and saw what was going on? God, I can't think of what it was called. Reconnaissance, though, all over the world.

FROST: Sounds like a film about Gary Powers and the Blackhawk

LUZIER: Yes. Did you go see that?

FROST: No.

LUZIER: Because they were flying right over our area.

FROST: Yes, but to me, anytime you start making a film of that kind you lose the real world. Sometimes they add a little bit here and add a little bit there, and they revamp things, and the credibility leaves a little bit to be desired.

LUZIER: Okay.

FROST: So I don't go to—oh, once in a while if there's a movie out that hits that area where I've been, I may go to that, but—very seldom.

LUZIER: They flew right over Lassen and Mt. Shasta doing their—

FROST: What were they reconning?

LUZIER: World situations over where the war is, you know? And coming back and forth. I can't remember the speeds. I shouldn't have even brought it up, because I can't talk intelligently about it, but it was fascinating, just fascinating. And the guy is located in Yuba City, I think it is, and he didn't even want to come to Redding, because he thought we were such a nobody up here in Redding, but he had the best audience and the most people he's ever had, because we are interested.

FROST: That's backwoods country [unintelligible].

LUZIER: Yes. He was [cross-talk; unintelligible].

FROST: [unintelligible] to get away from things, not to hide out.

LUZIER: Yes, yes, he was really shocked.

FROST: Yes, I've gotten the greatest education working for Forest Service. I've worked with [unintelligible], helicopter safety at meetings, where they had people there that just—[it's] absolutely amazing that they're still alive. A man walked up in front of a meeting there in a military uniform, cap, blouse, dark glasses on. Looked just like anybody else. They introduced him. He took his hat off, set it down, started talking to the audience, pulled off his gloves, took his scarf off, and he was a burn victim.

LUZIER: Wow.

FROST: And they had done some of the most fantastic work.

LUZIER: Doing skin grafts and things like that?

FROST: Oh, skin grafts, yes. They rebuilt his nose that had been burned off, and it was grafted to his shoulder for a "godawful" length of time.

LUZIER: You've really seen a lot.

FROST: Oh, boy. I got in on all those. This standardization of terminology and procedures [as a result of the FIRESCOPE program]—we had in Southern California—L.A. County had lots of money. It seemed like down there they could [get] new helicopters, new equipment—boy, they fought fire aggressively and [were] well financed. Ventura County was right behind them. Then there was CDF, and then there was Forest Service. And those of us working in the field had noticed that things were beginning to get cluttered and crowded. We turned in our complaints through channels, and all the time upper-level management was working on it. I'm sure they

were. But you'd go into L.A. country, and a fire would get away from L.A. that they had been fighting and go on government ground, then here'd come the government with initial attack, and we'd [sic; there would be] a convergence of two pretty good outfits, lots of airplanes, lots of people. We'd take initial attack when we fought fire in those days. We didn't have any standardization of communication. You'd be running along a fire, and here come [sic; comes] a helicopter right straight across in the middle of your whole mess, [at] treetop level.

LUZIER: Scary

FROST: Oh, it got to the point where we had to do something. That's when we started with this incident command or FIRESCOPE and all the rest of—

LUZIER: Yes, that IC.

FROST: Yes. And then I was with the C-130s [Lockheed C-130 Hercules] when they came into the program, up to and including battles, keeping them and the private contractors separated in Ontario. Boy, you talk about—earn your money!

LUZIER: So you were really aware of the public perception and all the factors that have changed?

FROST: You bet. You bet.

LUZIER: Did you deal with recruitment or any of that?

FROST: One session during the mid sixties. I was in charge of tanker pilot training school. Two outfits had moved to this country and took every initial attack pilot we had. Air America was one of them; then there were one or two more, for work overseas. So we had to put together a firefighting outfit. I've still got some of the lesson plans put together. Ernie Gentry and Grant Ruth flew initial attack, and we had it progressive—we set up ground school, and we had easy country to drop the first initial drops, then we moved them back into the country, in hill country,

where they'd run into conditions that were actual, or near actual. Then we put them on the list. I've still got lists of approved pilots.

And we did that nationally. If a pilot showed up here and he wasn't approved here, he'd go to another region, and they'd pick him up. But it didn't take long to stop that. The minute we had a pilot that, say, had a couple of tree strikes or a tree strike, for some reason or other you wanted to ground him; say he had a drinking habit—we would go through the system clear to the Washington office, and Washington would check the distribution of the people in charge in the field, and his name was added to a list, and he couldn't get a job anywhere.

LUZIER: Easily.

FROST: Anywhere. That's the way we took it off, out of the responsibility of line. The fire control officer didn't have to worry about it at all.

LUZIER: Wish it would be that easy inside on some of the other places.

FROST: Yes.

LUZIER: I mean, you're not even allowed to say that somebody did something wrong, and they can go to another agency and get promoted.

FROST: Yes, but see, once you begin to understand that system, there's [sic; there are] ways around it. There's the possibility of their going to jail. But we had a situation with a helicopter pilot hitting the bottle often, heavy. And then we had another situation right here in Redding. You analyze the situation, and your job as an airman is to take that problem away from line, get it out of his area. He's got other things to do. And so to put a cap on it right quick, you put him down. Local dispatch is told not to use him. And then depending on the situation, what kind of contacts he has and the rest of the things that you spin into it, you call his boss some night after hours and say, "Hey, you've got a problem," and you name the name and the place and where

it's at, and this guy wants to keep doing business with the Forest Service and say, "It would behoove you to find a replacement for him as quickly as possible, because we're not going to use him, and the only thing you'll collect for the duration of this fire is standby, that's all." The guy said, "Geez, I can't survive on that." And, bang, the guy disappears, and he don't [sic; doesn't] know why he was transferred. They drive you into management techniques that are subversive or whatever. But there's all kinds of that kind of stuff you have to do.

I used to get telephone calls here in the days when the dollar was tight, ten o'clock at night, and the guy would say, "Frosty, you need to inspect such-and-such airplane at such-and-such a base, and you need to do it real quick." I could go out to dispatch, pick up an airplane and be gone, just that quickly. And you'd find all kinds of things: things that were malfunctioning; an airplane that wasn't even operational would be on standby. I had a situation once where I had a pen knife, and I could run that pen knife into the leading edge of the props four and six inches from the end almost a quarter of an inch. Lamination separation. And it was a big 2,800 engine, swinging three blades. Tips could have come off anytime.

LUZIER: Wow.

FROST: When that happens at that RPM, it whips an engine right off the mount, and that's almost always a crash. But the guys that know you and trust you—

LUZIER: [unintelligible] each other.

FROST: That's right. There's a whole different world out there.

LUZIER: Yes, I hear you.

FROST: A whole different world.

LUZIER: I want to make sure that I'm asking you all the questions I'm supposed to.

FROST: Go right ahead.

LUZIER: And I may be doubling up. See, this says, "At one time the Forest Service's emphasis was on fire protection and management and then on the developing of public resources. However, the developing of our public resources became overdone in some areas. Activist groups and changing society during the seventies and eighties aimed at changing the laws to protect the environment. How do you understand the transition of this achievement, and what *were* the costs and benefits?" Maybe you've already kind of covered that.

FROST: No, I haven't covered all the aspects and all the ideas that people had to take care of that. But expediency in fire suppression was involved environmentally in everything. When I was a contract pilot with tankers, there was [sic; were] two airplanes up at Montague. We got a dispatch one afternoon. In Scott Valley there was a farmer. Had a grain field on fire. It was headed right straight for a barn and the ranch house. We made two passes. Grain, being a light fuel—the guy made a pass this way [demonstrates], [unintelligible] on his line and stretched—and we'd jockey those airplane[s] in light fuel and built the speeds up to get down closer, and you could stretch your load, and we put a V-shaped [unintelligible]. The fire would run up to it, laid down and died. And the guy called up later and wanted to ship over some booze to thank us, but what I'm saying is you get rid of the smoke, you get rid of the fire environmentally. Contamination, destruction of—buildings and things that are into it also. But environmentally. And for years we operated under the initial attack.

Then we went to a "let burn" modus of operandi [sic; modus operandi]. We did all kinds of crazy things. But the initial attack concept was the best: Hit it hard, hit it fast, get retardant on it so ground crews could get on it to mop up, and you're done with it. You're through. You're finished.

LUZIER: Because all kinds of things happen when you don't do that.

FROST: Oh, yes. Yes, we started—I noticed here the other day—I picked up a paper and read an article about the second burn. We've known for years a fire goes through, a lot of fuel doesn't get burned, and it lays [sic; lies] there and dries out and just becomes an addition to fuel, more fuel—

LUZIER: Fodder.

FROST: —the following years. It sits there, just waiting for another fire to start. It'll burn again. And I can remember getting instruction time and time again, as far back as the Mine Fire in '57. We wanted a clean burn, a clean burn. We went in, and [Wesley] "Wes" Spinney.

LUZIER: I remember that name.

FROST: —was trying to come up with the idea of hauling diesel-treated sawdust to drop [chuckles] in the burned area. Told him [chuckles], "Don't play with that idea, because we have to haul it in an airplane. It would set [sic; sit] there, and it would be a flying bomb."

LUZIER: Yes.

FROST: But anyway, they worked hard at a clean burn concept.

LUZIER: What are you most proud of in relation to your Forest Service life?

FROST: The most proud of?

LUZIER: Yes.

FROST: Oh, good Lord. [Pause.] If I didn't have some irate timekeeper kill me—[Laughter.] No, I look back, and there's a multitude of things that I was involved in, in a small way, and I take personal pride in that. No medals, no speeches. Got a few hero letters. Proud of those. But it would be hard to pick out any single thing. Pretty hard to do.

LUZIER: Have you written any stories yet?

FROST: No. No.

LUZIER: You should write—

FROST: People got tired of listening to me talk, for God's sake, let alone wanting to read something I wrote. [Chuckles.]

LUZIER: I bet you that would read it.

FROST: I don't know.

LUZIER: They would.

FROST: I don't know.

LUZIER: Do you have any thought about how the Forest Service could manage the forest or the fires of the future?

FROST: Ooh, you bet I have!

LUZIER: There's sure a lot in the papers lately.

FROST: Faster and more efficient.

[End CD Track 1. Begin CD Track 2.]

LUZIER: Well, we're on the second tape, and we're just finishing up, really. Do you have any thoughts about how the Forest Service could manage the fires of future? I asked you that. And you're going to share your photographs and documents, and I'll bring those back to you. Do you have any old movies or anything?

FROST: No, no movies, but I've got directives.

LUZIER: I'll just take that folder and copy it, if you don't mind. I'll copy those.

FROST: I haven't gone through this one yet.

LUZIER: Oh, you haven't.

FROST: No.

LUZIER: Do you have anything ready for me to take with me and copy?

FROST: I'll have to have you wait, now. This is just a bunch of hero letters I stuck in here.

LUZIER: I know they'll want to see some of them, so I'll take some of those that you want to share, so they'll have—

FROST: Just take a quick look.

LUZIER: Okay. Division of Aeronautics, June 1975, from Ford Miller, the deputy chief, in Sacramento, thanking you for your participation in the meeting. That's great. And MAFFS training, M-A-F-F-S.

FROST: Modular Airborne Fire Fighting System, C-130s.

LUZIER: Okay. And that's from—gosh, this guy must be Italian, Lawrence A. Amicarella, acting director of aviation and fire management, from the Washington office, thanking you.

FROST: I've run across this when we were talking about—you wanted names. This is the training program for the first national fire generalship school at Marana, Arizona. And this is the package we got in the mail for the cadre. This is the cadre.

LUZIER: Richard Baldwin, Herman Ball.

FROST: Ball, Childers, Crocker, Frost. This gives you our experience, our background.

LUZIER: Oh, that'll be wonderful. Can [sic; May] I make a copy of that?

FROST: Sure.

LUZIER: They may already have it, but maybe they don't.

FROST: It's two pages of that.

LUZIER: No, there's [sic; there are] three pages.

FROST: Oh, is [sic; are] there three?

LUZIER: Yes, two and a half. Monte Pierce, Kenneth Otten.

FROST: Monte Pierce was the Washington office head of air operations nationally.

LUZIER: Yes. [unintelligible] his name. This'll be neat, Bob—or Bill, thank you. Bob! [Chuckles.]

FROST: But, see, when I say "from the ground up," a lot of people don't realize until they put the written word together, a narrative leading up to all this stuff is going to have to include things like this. "The decision to use air tankers will be based on careful consideration of the following: fire potential, [unintelligible] threaten safety of lives, opportunity [unintelligible] more [unintelligible] control," ta-dah, ta-dah, ta-dah.

LUZIER: Remember, this lady has to translate [sic; transcribe] all this that you're saying. [Chuckles.]

FROST: Oh.

LUZIER: She has to be able to translate [sic; transcribe] it, what you're saying, so you can talk a little slower. We don't have to hurry that much. But anyway, these are the policies that you're talking about.

FROST: Yes. In our spare time, we worked on the manual, and—

LUZIER: Oh, I remember the manual.

FROST: That's right, 5700 Manual.

LUZIER: Oh, I put those together.

FROST: Everything we encountered that was a rarity in the air we brought back, analyzed, tore apart and then built a safe approach to. From the very beginning, we did that. That's where we learned how to drop out of a descending turn, not to load the wings up and get rid of the pitch up when you drop your retardant and things like this. Good communications and experience were

the things that helped us out the most. In my day, I had a bunch of pilots, flew a bunch of pilots that when they stepped on an airplane they were good. They were good.

The [unintelligible] Fire in Southern California. We averaged, for three hours and fifteen minutes of flight time in a T-34, dropping a tanker every three and a half minutes. Have as high [sic; many] as three of them: one dropping, one right behind him, another behind that, and all of them keyed to the point where they were ready to take evasive action if anything went wrong. But they were all qualified and well experienced.

LUZIER: That's the kind of outfit we have.

FROST: We built line. We did all kinds of things with those airplanes. They used to complain about working helicopters and tankers together. God, we'd been doing that in Ventura County, was the first time I ever run [sic; ran] into that. Steep country. We were hauling retardant from three different bases. And they were complaining about helicopters getting in the way of tankers and vice versa and so on and so forth. But you take the helicopters and move them in between tankers—you had line of communication—and let them support the crews on the ground, to cool everything down just ahead of them. Boy, they can build a line like crazy then, and use the big stuff, the stiff wings, the faster things out ahead of them on line building or hotspots, taking the heat out [unintelligible], stopping on the [military crest?], rocks, trees, whatever break you can take advantage of, then use helicopters to cool it down, cool it down, cool it down.

There's [sic; There are] so many different ways of fighting fire.

I think I've got another copy of that.

LUZIER: If you had your life to do allover, would you change any of the things you've done?

FROST: Yes. [unintelligible] had two [unintelligible]. I [unintelligible] lot more out of the system. See, I've even got my records when I took my helicopter rating. The hours I flew here in Bert Train's airplane and the hours I flew at—

LUZIER: Do I remember Bert Train?

FROST: —Nevada.

LUZIER: Was there anyone in particular who influenced you?

FROST: Several, several people. I knew Hank Jori a long, long time before I ever went to work for Forest Service. When I was a kid in construction, chasing around, I got caught between buses and had to get to Chester with no transportation. Got into the Red Bluff airport too late to catch anything out of Redding, and had Hank fly me to Chester in an old 150 Stinson station wagon [Stinson Voyager 150]. And he got me to work almost on time. But I was using aviation long time before I ever got involved.

LUZIER: I remember the other day we talked about how women play a role in firefighting. You have some ideas on that a little bit.

FROST: I've got some real, real severe hang-ups with it.

LUZIER: I read that article—

FROST: I don't say that discriminately [sic; in a discriminatory way]. Being born in the day and time that I was, I think that men should still hold the door open for a woman. But, like, I've stood up in front of a class and told the Hotshot crew when they first integrated women, "You're going to get somebody hurt. Every man here wants to take care of those kids, and if they have to break and run for it, they're not going to be able to put it in high gear until the women are out." I've got no hang-ups with a woman driving truck, working for the Southern Pacific, driving a

railroad spike, whatever she wants to do that she can do. I don't hold squawks about it. None whatsoever. But there's a point in time where—and I don't think I'll ever change.

LUZIER: I remember you talking about the fact of being asked to have a copilot that was a woman.

FROST: That's right.

LUZIER: When you were a married man.

FROST: That's right.

LUZIER: You know, things like that are touchy.

FROST: They're very, very. Only to some people. But I never did fly with a woman copilot, anything but local flight, you know.

LUZIER: So it's more based on your values, how you perceive life, a lot of it.

FROST: Yes.

LUZIER: Did you feel a sense of accomplishment with the Forest Service?

FROST: You bet.

See here?

LUZIER: Yes. I've got a half of inch of stuff to—can [sic; may] I make copies of this?

FROST: You don't want them.

LUZIER: You don't think I do? Well, let me look at them and see. Can [sic; May] I choose? I'll be very careful with them.

FROST: Sure. Oh, yes. I was going to put them in folders, like I did these pictures here, just for protection. Maybe someday the kids'll want them. I don't know.

LUZIER: Oh, they will. They will. They'll be real proud of them. I'll be very careful with them, and I'll bring them back.

FROST: And then here's—oh, boy.

LUZIER: Well, you've done an excellent job responding to the questions.

FROST: Well, for what little it's worth, you know? While you're looking through these, I've had some real, real favorite people, Doug Leisz being one, [Richard] "Dick" Millar, Howard [Koskella?]. I could give you a list.

LUZIER: That sounds good, what you've said.

FROST: I should give you a list.

LUZIER: The people that are special, outstanding.

FROST: Let me get—there's just other thing I want to show you.

LUZIER: Okay.

FROST: Performance, evaluation, donations [cross-talk; unintelligible].

LUZIER: Why don't I—I'll take it, and what I'll do is I'll look through it, and I'll see what I—I know I'm not really maybe the judge of it, but I'll see what would be most interesting that I think to them, and make copies and bring—oh, this is from Zane Smith, the regional forester.

FROST: I've got letters of commendation in there from Washington office.

LUZIER: Richard Millar. Yes. Great, great. Good work.

FROST: I've only got one copy of those. [Moves away from microphone.]

LUZIER: Do you want to trust me?

FROST: Oh, yes.

LUZIER: Okay.

FROST: Yes, I trust you.

FROST: [Returns to microphone.] I never was much for drawing personal attention. I know who I am and where I came from and know what my limitations are, and I don't care if the rest of the world doesn't know it. If you select those with that kind of an attitude, why—

LUZIER: You'll be okay.

FROST: Yes.

LUZIER: We'll be fine.

FROST: Here's my claim to fame in the *Logger* magazine. That's me setting [sic; sitting] there in the Stearman.

LUZIER: Wow.

FROST: But I've got—

LUZIER: Oh, that's cute.

FROST: —telephone cards, Orleans airport—

LUZIER: Oh, I remember Orleans.

FROST: And here's stuff—

LUZIER: Now, that's where you flew to pick somebody up one time.

FROST: Oh, yes.

LUZIER: It was Orleans, and I got to go along. I don't remember why. There was just time and room, and I remember flying in there.

FROST: I've been there lots of times. Now, this stuff here would be—let's keep that separate.

LUZIER: This stuff?

FROST: Yes.

LUZIER: Okay.

FROST: You're not interested in that *Logger*.

LUZIER: Is there an article in here with you?

FROST: Yes.

LUZIER: Well, let me—

FROST: Yes, but not much. It's just in general.

LUZIER: Just a general thing?

FROST: But here's how we used to stretch our retardant loads to make it do the job.

LUZIER: Yes.

FROST: You get downhill running and can build your speed up twenty, thirty knots. Boy, you can stretch that load out.

LUZIER: So there's a certain way to unload—

FROST: You can make that load go a long way. Here's a drop that was done in a test, and here's formation of two doing the same thing.

LUZIER: [unintelligible] the right way.

FROST: Yes.

LUZIER: Wow. I think this would be really interesting because it's got Wes Spinney. I remember him, supervisor on the Six Rivers National Forest.

FROST: Here's Inyo National Forest, first airplane to land on the [Tunnel?] Ranger Station airplane landing field in 1931. And this one's on the Tahoe National Forest, the Bloomfield Fire in 1924; photo by Van Montgomery. I already had copies—there's [sic; there are] two of each of those. And here is—

LUZIER: Tahoe, and it says it on the back. Bloomfield Fire, 1924. Wow.

FROST: Now, here's that stretching the load again, the Southern California fire, either '56 or '57.

LUZIER: Stretching a load.

FROST: Yes.

LUZIER: I'll just note that these are pictures of fires and airplanes and how to stretch a load. Yes, here's another one. And this is the Inaja [pronouncing it in-AH-juh] —how do you pronounce that?—I-n-a-j-a Fire.

FROST: Inaja [pronounces it in-AH-hah].

LUZIER: in-AH-hah.

FROST: Yes.

LUZIER: Is that on that—

FROST: Southern California.

LUZIER: That's what I thought.

FROST: I think it was on the Angeles [National Forest].

LUZIER: I was going to say Angeles.

FROST: Now, there—see, none of this stuff I want to give to the museum. That's the 1959, '60 and '61 pictures of setting up [the] service center.

LUZIER: Oh.

FROST: That's the hangar and the administrative officers across the way.

LUZIER: Oh. Wow. Well, if I make copies, then could I come down and I could make notes on it, what they're about?

FROST: Yes, if you want to.

LUZIER: Yes, because that would be interesting [cross-talk; unintelligible].

FROST: When I first started putting this stuff together—

LUZIER: And I've got one of those.

FROST: What's the gal that was going to come down here with you?

LUZIER: Janet Buzzini?

FROST: Janet Buzzini, yes.

LUZIER: Did she talk to you?

FROST: No, but I was going to get all this stuff together and then just give it to her. She was getting stuff for the museum then. This has been some time back. But these are some of the statistics we used to keep to promote—

LUZIER: Region Five.

FROST: —to promote the justification of airplanes in Region Five.

LUZIER: "Inter-Regional Air Routes for the Air Operations in 1954, Region Five." Huh. And it shows from Washington through Montana and down into Arizona.

FROST: That was something [Calvin] "Cal" Ferris put together. See, that was advertising for air.

LUZIER: Great. Yes, and then on the other side it has "Assigned Aircraft Abstract," total hours by flying months.

FROST: You never got to know Cal Ferris, did you?

LUZIER: Yes, I remember him. Don't I remember him? Yes. Isn't he the one that had the little car he was always working on? Because it was one of those real elite cars, and he was always having to adjust the carburetor.

FROST: Ed Ruhl.

LUZIER: What?

FROST: Ed Ruhl. I ended up with that car.

LUZIER: Did you really? [Laughs.] He was *always* working on that.

FROST: Yes. But when Ed left the country, I ended up trading that car to two kids at Hayfork for wood.

LUZIER: I'll be darned.

FROST: But I run [sic; ran] it around here for—played with it like a kid.

LUZIER: Yes. That was a fun—it was a convertible of some kind, wasn't it?

FROST: Yes, convertible. MGB.

LUZIER: Yes. I think it was just a really special car.

FROST: Yes.

LUZIER: But he was always having to adjust it, always having it in the warehouse.

FROST: Now, see, this letter, I wouldn't take a ton of money for. This is the kind you frame and hang on the wall.

LUZIER: The subject is "Performance and Safety During Siege of '87 Fires, February 12, 1988, from Northern California Service Center, Sidney L. Nobles." I wonder what his middle name is, Lawrence? "Sidney L. Nobles, North Zone Emergency Operations Coordinator." To Bill Frost. "I would like to share with you my appreciation for the outstanding effort on your part in assisting the Northern California Service Center during the fire siege of '87. During this period, starting in late August through mid-October, approximately 200 personnel were working at the center, involved in one capacity or another, in the movement of personnel, ground equipment and aircraft from thirty-seven different states and over 145 contributing agencies. This period probably represents the most difficult fire load impact to ever be experienced by any fire agency.

"It is most noteworthy that an estimated 140,000 hours of accident free work was performed by people putting in long hours with little rest over a prolonged period of time. I realize that it was truly a good team effort, but your skills and cooperative spirit resulted in a safe

and successful operation anyone could be proud of. The situation and your demonstrated performance surely present a true example of special effort in accomplishing such a safety record. Our critiques usually point out areas where things went wrong, but I want you to know I appreciate the fact that the overall job was well done.

"Sidney L. Nobles, North Zone Emergency Operations Coordinator."

That's a nice one! Nice letter.

FROST: See the date on that?

LUZIER: Yes, February 12th, 1988.

FROST: I'd been out of the service six years.

LUZIER: Then, yes. So you went back, and back.

FROST: Well, I was flying for Empire Airlines then.

LUZIER: Oh.

FROST: Empire Airways, doing the same thing I'd done for Forest Service.

But I've got things here, like this old accident report on Tom Reginetter, the jumper that got killed here. And this is stuff that I used to use for attention getters when I was stepping up to the podium to talk to a bunch of people about safety. This isn't on now, is it?

LUZIER: Yes.

FROST: Oh, is it?

LUZIER: Yes.

FROST: But I used to use that for [sic; as an] attention getter.

LUZIER: "Air Tanker Operation Accidents." And what type, and the names of the pilots and the aircraft and the date back to '61.

FROST: Whether it was a fatal or a non-fatal [accident].

LUZIER: I'll be darned.

FROST: See, in eleven years, we killed thirty-five people.

LUZIER: My God! I didn't realize that.

FROST: Yes. And that's just part [unintelligible], just part of it.

LUZIER: Wow.

FROST: And I had information coming in from helicopters [unintelligible] the same thing. I wanted to build a complete record of those that had been killed in this business.

LUZIER: I didn't realize—

FROST: I don't think we'd ever get 'er done.

LUZIER: It goes clear back to '59, '58. Huh. Wow. "Hit a tree...Stalled while making a forced landing...Settled back on takeoff...Gear-up landing...Uphill drop." Yes, when you drop—

FROST: See, when we first started in this business, the tankers only had one—we didn't have a program to follow, and so you'd build a tank and you'd put it in an airplane, and if it worked, why, you were that much ahead, and if it didn't, why, you kept working until you got something that worked. So most of them were tied into—like, anything that opened hydraulically was tied into the main system on the airplane, but we only had one dump system. If you lost your hydraulics, then you couldn't get your gear down, but you're setting [sic; sitting] there with 800 gallons of retardant on an F7F. So you'd have to set that thing down—I don't want to circulate [unintelligible].

LUZIER: Yes, I think it's better not to.

FROST: You don't want to land in that configuration.

LUZIER: So what do you do?

FROST: So we come [sic; came] up with a second system. Every retardant-hauling aircraft had to have a second system to dump, an emergency dump. If he's running an uphill run and the first system fails, then he can [unintelligible] his load anyway by going to the second dump system, but then he's going to catch hell anyway for being in an uphill run to start with. That was the only justification for being the lead plane pilot. You saw to it that they didn't do that. Safety was uppermost, cost was second, and fire effectiveness—everything had to be done safety wise. You planned their trips all downhill, good getaways out, good visibility, good escape routes—

LUZIER: That was counting that the smoke wasn't in the way.

FROST: That's right.

LUZIER: [Laughs.]

FROST: But you work around that. Yes. Anyway.

LUZIER: A lot of things to think about.

FROST: Yes, and I think it's—

LUZIER: Arlen Cravens. He's still out there, isn't he?

FROST: Yes, he is. I saw Arlen someplace here not too long ago.

LUZIER: Yes. My daughter is friends with his wife.

FROST: But this stuff—is it going to the museum or just going to a write-up?

LUZIER: I don't know for sure. I don't know the answer on that, but it probably would end up going to the museum. But I know it's going to be possibly used for a book. I know they'll incorporate it into you—oh, and I didn't go by and pick up that book. I was going to—I'll bring that next time, about *The Lure of the Forest*.

FROST: Okay.

LUZIER: Because that's what the book was called last time that they made, and they'll probably do another book.

FROST: One of the most informative books about Forest Service I ever got my hands on was *The First Hundred Years*.

LUZIER: Yes, that's a good one.

FROST: Yes. I loaned my copy to somebody, and to this day I can't remember who it was.

LUZIER: Oh, you always write it down on a little note and put it where your bills are, and then you can remind them next month.

FROST: Never came home.

LUZIER: Well, I've got one if you want to look at it again.

FROST: *First Hundred Years*?

LUZIER: Yes.

FROST: I'd like to go through it.

LUZIER: I'm almost sure I have that.

FROST: Because that starts way back when the old boy saddled his horse and rode to the fire and fought until it was out.

LUZIER: Ah. I'll make sure, but I think I have that. Okay. Well, I've got a lot of material here, and I just want to really thank you for allowing us to interview you.

FROST: Oh, hey. It's like the Marine Corps. Once you've been in the Marine [Corps], you never get out, really. The Forest Service is the same way.

LUZIER: Yes, isn't it that way?

FROST: Yes.

LUZIER: I mean, I was raised in it, and I just can't imagine any life other than the Forest Service. [Chuckles.]

FROST: Oh, I can. I was totally independent in lumber and totally independent in construction. I carried a card in the operating engineers for fourteen years, and that was everything from crane operator to tearing up the country with an old D-7 or a D-8 Cat.

LUZIER: Well, I'm going to close it. It's ten after two, and we've been talking for almost two hours.

FROST: And we haven't told you any stories.

LUZIER: I know! Do you want to tell a story? You got a good one?

FROST: I probably ought to go through the risqué ones and delete those.

LUZIER: [Laughs.] Is there one you can tell?

FROST: Oh, there's [sic; there are] several, several.

LUZIER: Give us a good one, just to send us off.

FROST: [Chuckles.] No, no, there's always somebody that could take offense to my sense of humor. [Laughter.]

LUZIER: Okay, Bill. Thank you.

FROST: But I was a public nuisance around that place for years. Fire cache.

LUZIER: As?

FROST: I used to kid McCauley. I'd tell him, "You don't have to bother. I'll take [unintelligible] for you [unintelligible]." [Chuckles.] He'd shake his head. When I first went there, Claire Miller—

LUZIER: I remember.

FROST: —around the fire cache, and in those days we were so cost conscious that there was a mezzanine on the south end of that fire cache and stairs leading up to it, and that was Claire's workshop. He had a ton of parts, spare parts and stuff in there, everything from Coleman lantern valves to little hard-to-get things, and stuff that would come back in off the fires that the could salvage, he'd take up there and he'd work on them and then he'd put them back in the cache. That got too slow, too dangerous and too expensive, so they finally got rid of that. But then there was Russ Henderson.

LUZIER: I remember Russ.

FROST: Yes. And then there was—

LUZIER: He knew how to get rid of it. [Laughs.]

FROST: No comment.

LUZIER: [Laughs.]

FROST: No comment.

LUZIER: Poor soul.

FROST: Yes. Well, he was—anyway.

LUZIER: Yes.

FROST: Anyway.

LUZIER: Well, thank you, Bill.

FROST: Those are the stories that'll never come to light, probably, except around a beer jug someplace at a bar.

LUZIER: Yes.

FROST: And the guys get to talking—

[End of interview.]